THE BYRDS
LIFT OFF!

PETE TOWNSHEND
"THE WHO AREN'T DONE YET"

MOJO

Music Magazine

145 REVIEWS
RICHARD THOMPSON
KATHLEEN HANNA
DAVID BOWIE
THE BEATLES
& MORE

EXCLUSIVE!

"I'VE REALISED HOW PRECIOUS TIME IS"

PAUL WELLER

THIS IS *HIS* MODERN WORLD

DUSTY SPRINGFIELD
THE LOOK OF LOVE

DIRTY THREE
PUSH THE SKY AWAY

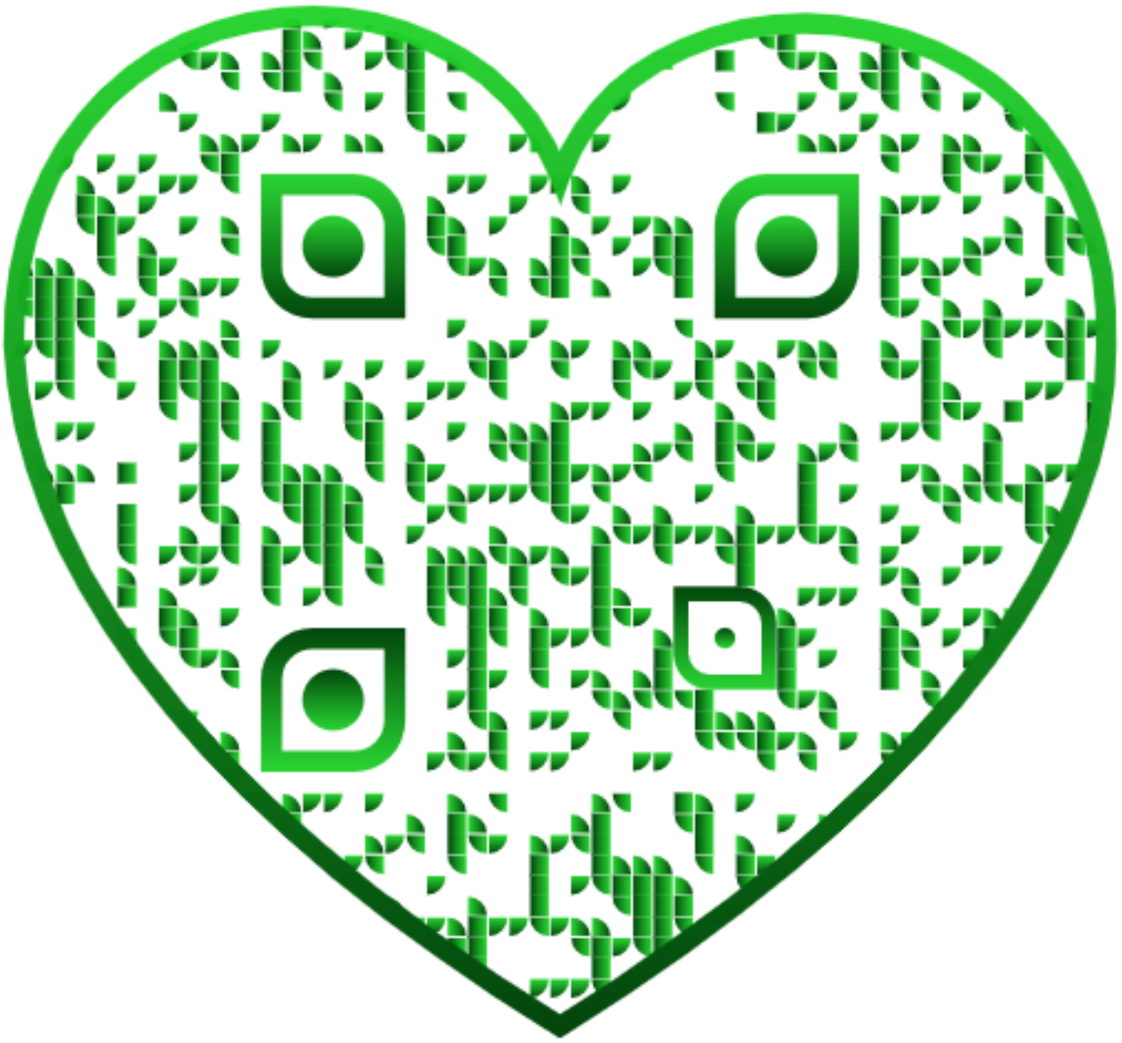
BELLE AND SEBASTIAN
INDIE-POP EPIPHANY

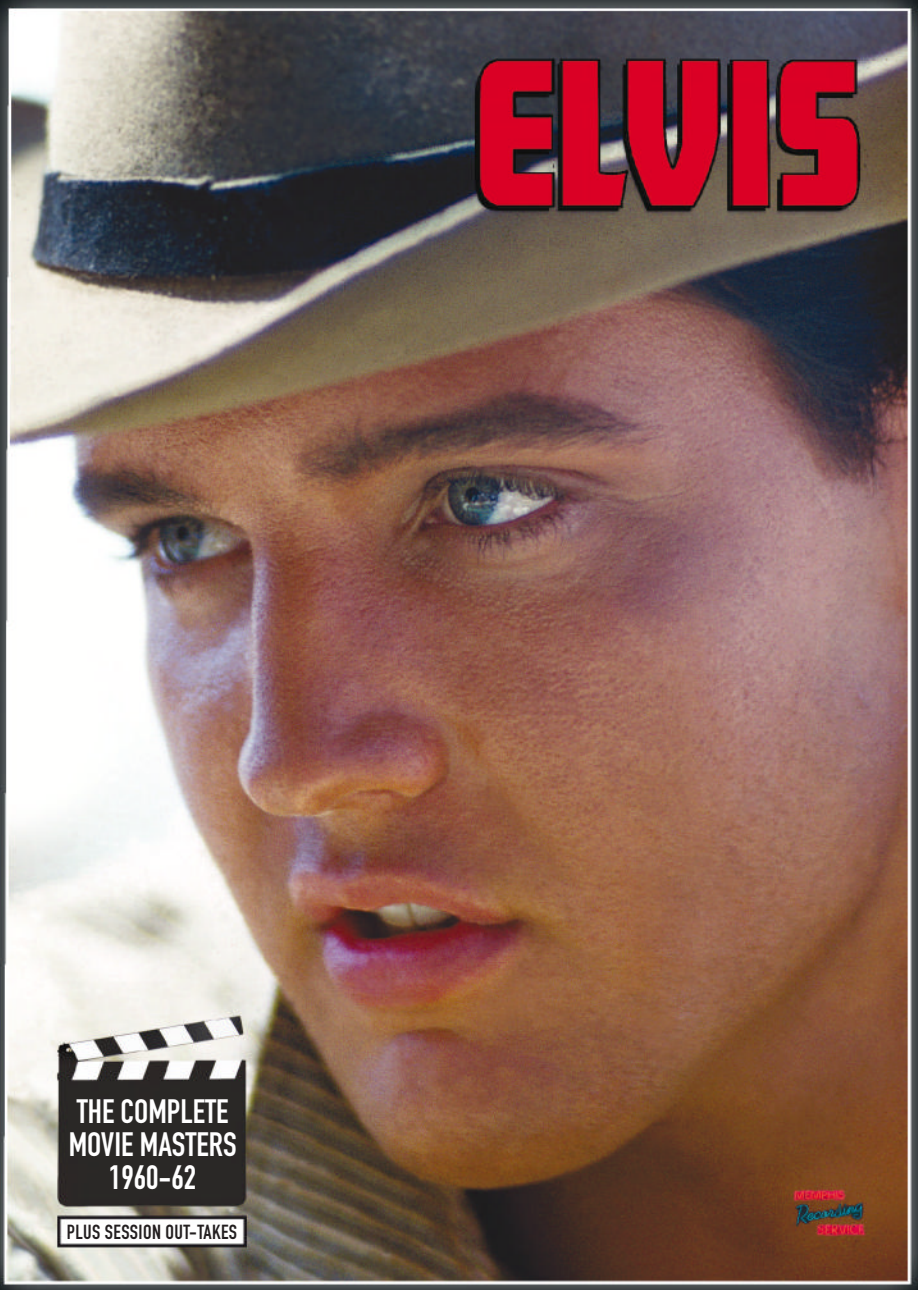
JOHNNY CASH
SONGWRITER RESURRECTED!

MOTÖRHEAD
HARD! FAST! DISGUSTING!

MARVIN GAYE
THE LOST SONGS

SLY, AMY, COSTELLO AND...
QUESTLOVE





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PETE TOWNSHEND, P52

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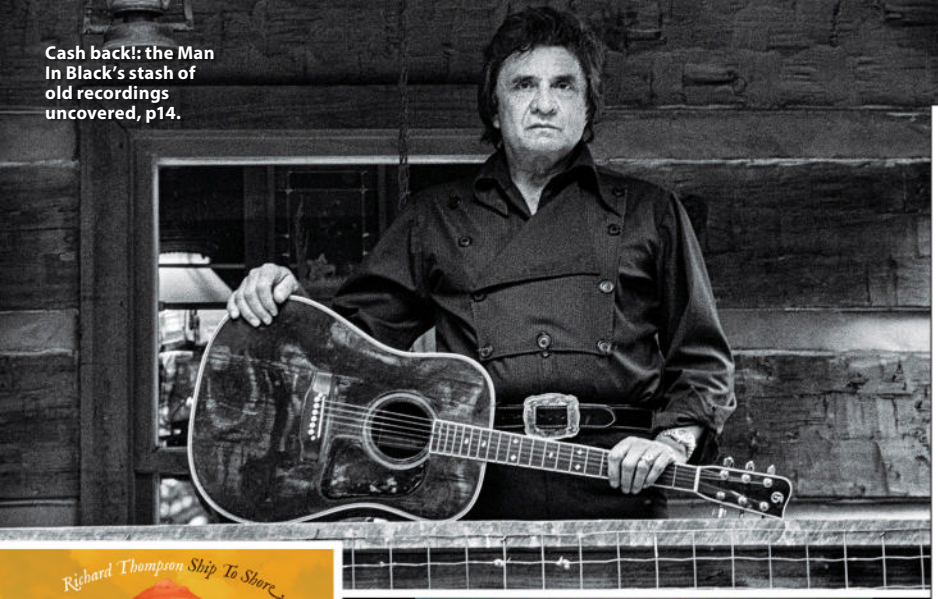
Charlie Gillett/Getty



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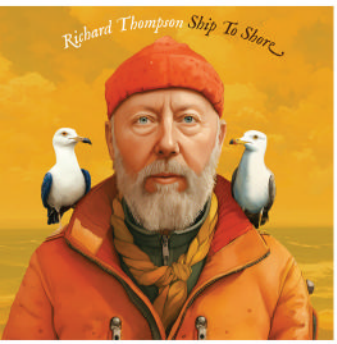

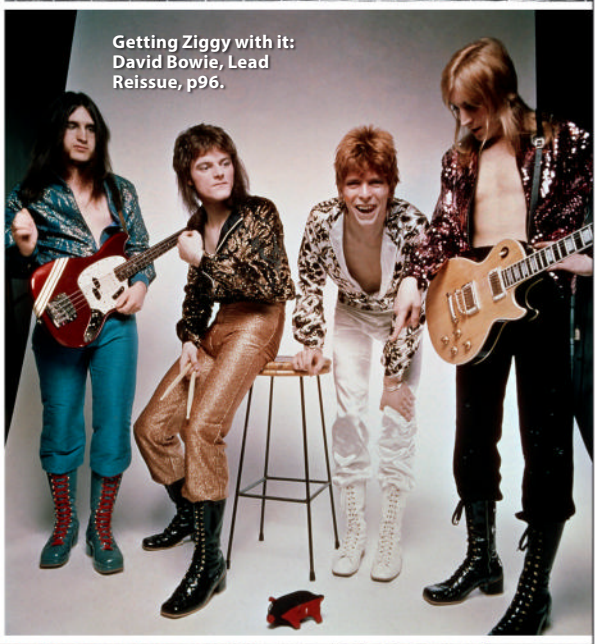

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All aboard for Richard Thompson's *Ship To Shore*, Lead Album, p82.

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE...

Kevin Westenberg

Kevin celebrates 26 years of taking pictures for MOJO (including portraits of Radiohead, The White Stripes and Robert Fripp) by shooting Paul Weller for the cover. He's currently working on future exhibitions and a Taschen book project. Go to his Instagram (@kevinwestenberg) for more.

Jon Savage

Jon has been writing about gender, sexuality and pop music since the late 1970s, when he featured Siouxsie for Sounds and David Bowie for The Face. He interviewed Dusty Springfield – candid and funny, far from her media image – for the Observer in 1989. He tells her story, part of his new book, from p36.

Mark Blake

Mark is the author of recent MOJO pieces on The Yardbirds, The Black Crowes and Led Zeppelin, and several acclaimed music biographies, including Pretend You're In A War: The Who & The Sixties. This month, he talks Pete Townshend through another turbulent decade in the Who man's career (see p52).

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BETH GIBBONS
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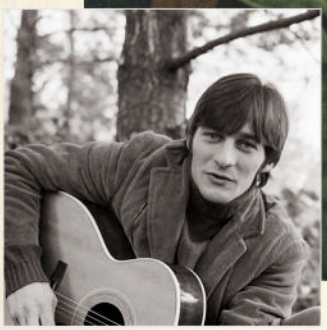
Jingle Jangle Mornings

A BYRDS COMPANION



1 GENE CLARK
Past Tense

"The Byrds were done when Gene left," David Crosby is quoted as saying on page 69. Not quite, but they did lose the elegiac folk-tinged powerpop Clark had mastered. The gorgeous Past Tense is from 1967's long-lost *Gene Clark Sings For You*; a tentative first solo effort, equal to his early Byrds classics.

To the best of Clark's sons' knowledge, Gene Clark is the sole writer of the song and it is published by Gene Clark Music. ℗2018 Gene Clark Music, Inc. under exclusive licence to Omnivore Recordings, A division of Omnivore Entertainment Group LLC. QMWHB1810957

2 THE SCOTTSVILLE SQUIRREL BARKERS
Reuben

While many Byrds did early time in clean-cut folk groups, Chris Hillman apprenticed in this rowdier San Diego group. Maximum-velocity bluegrass was their forte, showcased on a solitary 1963 album, *Blue Grass Favourites*. Among other Squirrel Barkers: future Eagle Bernie Leadon, who'd briefly reunite with Hillman in The Flying Burrito Brothers.

Traditional arr by The Scottsville Squirrel Barkers. ℗1963 Ace Copyrights Ltd (Cosmos Music) ISRC GBBHN0300468. Orig Cat no is Crown CLP 5346

3 THE LOUVIN BROTHERS
The Christian Life

Hillman's bluegrass upbringing meant that the original Byrds were hardly ignorant of country music. But it was Gram Parsons' brief tenure that made explicit their love of a tradition generally disdained by their rock peers. Among the covers handled with such class on 1968's *Sweetheart Of The Rodeo* – this quavering devotional from the Louvins' 1959 masterpiece, *Satan Is Real*.

Written by Charlie Louvin, Ira Louvin. Copyright Control. First released: 1959

4 CHRIS HILLMAN
Bells Of Rhymney

Pete Seeger's tale of a Welsh mining disaster was a highlight of The Byrds' 1965 debut album, and it retains all of its power on this version from Hillman's most recent solo album. The high harmonies come from his old friend David Crosby; production is courtesy of perhaps The Byrds' most auspicious jingle-jangle descendant, Tom Petty.

Written by Pete Seeger, Idris Davies. Publisher: Ludlow Music (BMI) ℗&©2017 Rounder Records, distributed by Concord. From *Bidin' My Time* (Rounder Records)

9 DINOSAUR JR
I'll Feel A Whole Lot Better

A bratty 1989 tear through Gene Clark's beautiful song; J Mascis later admitted he found The Byrds too "wimpy" and was not a fan at the time of recording. Nevertheless, Dinosaur Jr's full-throttle version shows how robustly Byrds songs can not just withstand irreverent treatments, but also showcase much noisier guitar innovators.

Written by Gene Clark. Published by Gene Clark Music (BMI) adm. Warner-Tamerlane Publishing. ℗&©1989 Dinosaur Jr. Inc; www.dinosaurjr.com

10 CLARENCE WHITE
Byrd Jam AKA White's Lightning

The Byrds in all but name here, as the 1970 line up – McGuinn, Gene Parsons (drums) and Skip Battin (bass) – join their lead guitarist, flatpicking maestro Clarence White, on this exceptional country-psych freakout. White had played sessions on Byrds records since 1967, before joining up formally as Gram Parsons' replacement a year later.

Written by McGuinn, White. ©Liberation Hall. https://soundcloud.com/clarencewhite-music

11 WOODY GUTHRIE
Pretty Boy Floyd

While Gram Parsons brought The Louvin Brothers and Merle Travis to the *Sweetheart Of The Rodeo* sessions, Roger McGuinn dug into his folk prehistory for them, and came up with Woody Guthrie's mythography of 1930s robber Charles 'Pretty Boy' Floyd. The Byrds would return to Guthrie's songbook when they covered his Deportee (Plane Wreck At Los Gatos) on 1969's *Ballad Of Easy Rider*.

Written by Guthrie. Woody Guthrie Publications. First released: 1958

12 PETE SEEGER
Turn! Turn! Turn! (To Everything There Is A Season)

Seeger's stirring take on the Book Of Ecclesiastes, biblical poetry transformed into contemporary protest song, became one of The Byrds' biggest hits in 1965. Although Seeger wrote the song as early as 1959, it first surfaced on record in 1962 – via a version by folk troupe The Limeliters – and then with this live version by Seeger himself.

Written by Seeger. Copyright Control. First released: 1962

Courtesy Omnivore Recordings, Courtesy Ace Records, Michael Ochs Archives/Getty (3), Rachel Murray/Getty, Paul Hoeffler/Getty, Photofest, Gie Knaeps/Getty, Gijsbert Hanekroot/Getty

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JULY 1965. MR. TAMBOURINE MAN HAS JUST CLIMBED TO Number 1 in the British singles chart, and Roger – well, Jim – McGuinn is telling the Melody Maker what it is, exactly, that his band do. "All Dylan's music can have the jet age applied to it," he explains. "Perhaps there was a gap between the folk and rock fields, that needed filling."

Roots music supercharged for the rock era – it's a pretty good articulation of The Byrds' MO, but it only tells part of the story of this most transformative of American bands. This month's MOJO CD endeavours to fill in a little more detail, as we uncover the blues, R&B, folk and country songs, the Indian ragas and Turkish poems, that fuelled The Byrds' mission to both honour and transcend traditional musics. There's room, too, to showcase some of the remarkable individual talents that passed through The Byrds' ranks – not just McGuinn, but Gene Clark and Chris Hillman, Gram Parsons and Clarence White – and to hear how their indelible songs could be repurposed by a younger generation of guitar radicals. In that jingle jangle morning, they'll come following you…

5 RAY CHARLES
Come Back Baby

If Crosby appeared to arrive in The Byrds as a folk musician, via Les Baxter's Balladeers, his musical prehistory was more varied and complicated, and included a 1963 solo session with producer Jim Dickson featuring a spirited take on the flipside to Charles's classic I Got A Woman single. The Byrds returned to their R&B roots when they covered William Bell's You Don't Miss Your Water on *Sweetheart Of The Rodeo*.

Written by Walter Davis. Progressive. First released: 1957

6 ROGER McGUINN
So You Want To Be A Rock'n'Roll Star

McGuinn has always asserted that 1967's So You Want To Be A Rock'n'Roll Star was more of an amused observation of The Monkees rather than a jaded critique of success, and this filigreed 2018 version bears that out: a nostalgic evocation of Byrdsmania, complete with screaming crowds. Magical guitarplay, too.

Written by Roger McGuinn and Chris Hillman. Published by McGuinn Music (BMI) and Bar None Music, Inc. (BMI) in the United States. Courtesy of April First Productions. ℗ year is 2018

7 MERLE TRAVIS
I Am A Pilgrim

Another country nugget repurposed on *Sweetheart Of The Rodeo*. I Am A Pilgrim first surfaced in two 1860s hymn books: Hymns For The Camp and The Southern Zion's Songster. One suspects, though, that Parsons and The Byrds learned it from this 1947 version by Merle Travis, a country star from Kentucky as well known for his fingerpicking guitar technique as his songs of coal mining life in Muhlenberg County.

Traditional arr by Merle Travis. Duchess Music Corp. First released: 1947

8 THE INTERNATIONAL SUBMARINE BAND
Luxury Liner

An Ur-text of Cosmic American Music, the ISB's *Safe At Home* was released after Gram Parsons had broken up the band to join The Byrds. Chris Hillman was already aware of the Harvard drop-out's genius – and songs like Luxury Liner made him perfect for a band in flux after David Crosby's departure.

Written by Gram Parsons. Published by GPJ Music/ Hot Burrito Music. ℗ Sundazed Music LLC. From the 1968 album *Safe At Home*

13 NÂZIM HIKMET
Kiz Çocuğu

The Byrds tackled another 1962 Seeger recording in 1966 when they covered an anti-war song he'd performed called I Come And Stand At Every Door on their third album, *Fifth Dimension*. The source of the lyrics, however, was Kiz Çocuğu (The Girl Child), this poem by the Turkish writer Nâzim Hikmet, written in the aftermath of the US atom bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Written by Hikmet. Unknown. First broadcast: 1958

14 LEADBELLY
Take A Whiff On Me

The Byrds' 1970 album, *(Untitled)*, was a mix of old songs reinvigorated live by the Clarence White line-up – notably a frenzied 16-minute Eight Miles High – and new recordings. Alongside tracks intended for a musical, Gene Tryp, the band also rattled through this gem from Leadbelly's 1930s repertoire. His was not the first recorded version, though: the Memphis Jug Band got there in 1930, titling the song Cocaine Habit Blues.

Traditional arr Leadbelly. Copyright Control. First released: 1934

15 RAVI SHANKAR
Evening Raga

Were The Byrds the first rock band to tune into the Indian master's music? David Crosby certainly claimed as much. "I have dug Shankar for a long time," he told Melody Maker in May 1966. "[His] sitar sound has always intrigued me. I played some of his records for George Harrison and it turned him on. He bought [a sitar] which The Beatles used on Norwegian Wood."

Traditional arr Shankar. Copyright Control. First released: 1962

Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images

"IT WAS THE BEST SCENE EVER!" ROGER McGUINN ON THE BYRDS STARTS PAGE 62

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Thursday 27th June - The Half Moon, Putney
Friday 28th June - Blues At The Bay, Stockton
Saturday 29th June - Saltburn Blues Club, N Yorkshire
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Russell Crowe

AKA RUSS LE ROQ

What music are you currently grooving to?

A young American dude called **Brake**, he's got a song called Cigarettes & Black Lipstick Stains which is just crazy, man. I'm also really getting into **Ren**, a sort of poet/rapper extraordinaire, and **Teddy Swims**, who's got a beautiful voice. And **Lennie Loftin** from North Carolina, who specialises in songs about murder.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Man, it changes, right? But **Etta James**'s *Love's Been Rough On Me* has been a constant record in my life, probably since about '98, and I sort of circle back to it every few years. At another point in time, it would have been something by **The Blasters** or **Robert Gordon** or **Elvis Costello**'s *King Of America* – what a record!

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

It was a record store called Zounds in Sydney. It was possibly *Band On The Run* by **Paul McCartney & Wings**.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Probably **Elvis**, y'know, '54 to '59. I'm a big fan of **Billy Bragg** and **Bob Geldof**, who I think gets very little credit for his talent as a songwriter.

What do you sing in the shower?

Lately, an Italian song called Sarà Perché Ti Amo, and also The Confrontation Duet from Les Misérables, because I get to perform that later on in the year with Andrea Bocelli.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

If I've had a heavy week's work, **Marvin Gaye**, or maybe **John Coltrane**.

And your Sunday morning record?

I'll gently guide myself into the day with something like Lakmé by **Delibes**. Or **Johnny Cash**.

Russell Crowe's Indoor Garden Party plays the UK and Ireland in July.

ALL BACK TO MY PLACE

THE STARS REVEAL THE SONIC DELIGHTS GUARANTEED TO GET THEM GOING...

Bernard Butler

GUITAR HERO

What music are you currently grooving to?

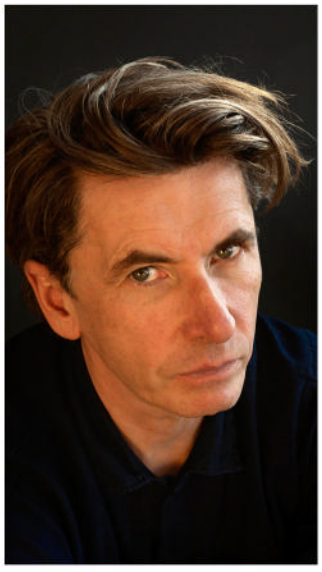
Radio 3 in the kitchen and Magic in the shower. I don't like being close to music that I might make, and I like being neither here nor there.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Spirit Of Eden, **Talk Talk**. It travels well through my life, continuing to perplex me. I lean into every word, every noise. It tells me to keep learning and never stops being beautiful.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

The Smiths, **The Smiths**, at W.H. Smith's in Wood Green the Saturday after release with my Christmas gift voucher. I think about it every time I walk through Wood Green.



Eva Vermandel

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

As a kid I wanted **Johnny Marr** for the [Gibson ES-] 355, **Roddy Frame** for the double denim, **Bernard Sumner** for the haircut. I got the 355, am always happy in double dens but my hair is better long so I named my dog after Barney. As soon as I heard myself recorded, I realised I had failed to emulate anyone as well as I hoped, but that something different had happened instead. Currently it is just **Joni**.

What do you sing in the shower?

Give It Up by **KC & The Sunshine Band** – because I've been singing this for joy since before we had a shower.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Xanadu, **Olivia Newton-John** – accompanied by the extended scene from the film with Gene Kelly roller-skating in a tuxedo followed by a troupe of freaks in cardigans clapping out of time, Jeff Lynne's marvellous military build and, finally, Olivia sashaying down the stairs.

And your Sunday morning record?

Hejira, **Joni Mitchell** – because Joni can make you feel awakened. She reminds you to keep moving and keep discovering yourself.

Bernard Butler's Good Grief is released May 31 on 355 Recordings.

Anaïs Mitchell

BONNY LIGHT HORSEMAN WOMAN

What music are you currently grooving to?

I'm *obsessed* with **Kacey Musgraves**' *Deeper Well*. I think it's a masterpiece. The writing, the acoustic guitar tones, her gorgeous delivery.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Joni Mitchell, *Hejira*. Which is so weird 'cos that was my dad's music, I listened to it growing up, and then it became mine. I know it so well and it also remains mysterious, like the ideal marriage partner.

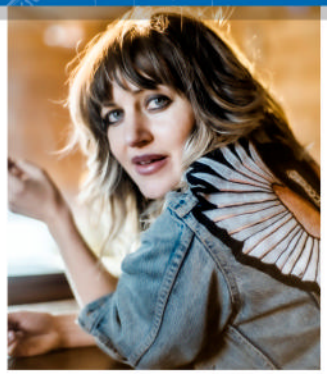
What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

I'm pretty sure I bought four new-ish albums on the same day from a local shop in Vermont. I think cassettes! They were **C+C Music Factory**, *Gonna Make You Sweat*, **Pearl Jam**, *Ten*, **Nirvana**, *Nevermind*, and **Whitney Houston**'s *The Bodyguard OST*.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

When I'm playing with Bonny Light Horseman and Josh Kaufman is taking a solo I want to be **Josh Kaufman**. If/when the music gets to a deep place, I sort of feel like I *am* him.

> "Joni Mitchell's *Hejira* is mysterious, like the ideal marriage partner."
> ANAÏS MITCHELL



What do you sing in the shower?

I take baths most of the time. Sometimes I'll just put a few inches of water in and wash like I'm from the 19th century. I don't tend to sing but pop songs from my childhood come into my head: Waiting For A Star To Fall by **Boy Meets Girl**, Valerie by **Steve Winwood**, things like that.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

I'm two kids deep and I rarely dance any more but for me the best dance record ever is **Robyn**'s *Body Talk*.

And your Sunday morning record?

John Martyn's *London Conversation*. It makes me feel warm, as do the early **Cat Stevens** records, and actually a lot of British Isles guitar-based male folk singers from the '70s – **Nic Jones**, **Martin Carthy**, **Paul Brady**.

Bonny Light Horseman's Keep Me On Your Mind/See You Free is out on Jagjaguwar on June 7.

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Theories, rants, etc.

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WE RECEIVED A GOOD LETTER THIS month from Jeff Ash in Wisconsin, admiring how the stories we tell in MOJO frequently intertwine with one another. Plenty of artists we cover have an air of the Lone Genius about them. But it doesn't take much effort to see beyond the myths and locate them in a vast network of collaborators, kindred spirits, disciples, influences, and unlikely connections.

Sometimes, we anticipate these links. For our Paul Weller feature, we spoke not just to Weller, but to the illustrious guests who co-wrote songs with him for his new album, among them Noel Gallagher and Suggs. "On day one of our working together I said, Well, it's only music," Suggs tells us. "And the phone went silent. To Paul, music really is the most important thing in the world."

Elsewhere, threads come together in more unexpected ways. Jane Fonda remembers hosting The Byrds. John Grant reveals his table tennis sessions with Grace Jones. Dylan's bassist Tony Garnier makes a cameo in our Rising section for new artists. Alongside a characteristically frank and thoughtful Pete Townshend interview, David Gilmour calls his old sparring partner "so nice and encouraging". And then, the spectacularly well-connected Questlove provides the issue's biggest curveball when he casually mentions a recent phone call with Townshend. Which producer did The Roots' super-drummer and The Who's arch-conceptualist nerd out about? Perhaps we'll save that one for page 31…

JOHN MULVEY, EDITOR

What the hell was that, man?

Great Kate Bush article in MOJO 367. A cold midweek in early 1977, and my sister Marian suggested we go and see her (ex-school) friend Kate at the Rose Of Lee, Lewisham. The pub was almost empty, bar us and a band on one side. We spotted Julie Covington (remember Rock Follies?) in one corner. Sure enough, the KT Bush Band were on. At half time, Marian brought Kate over to us to say hello. I congratulated Kate on the set, but to my eternal shame asked whether she would do Route 66 – Kate replied she didn't know it. I can't say I remember much about the set, but do remember thinking James And The Cold Gun (with her characteristic "whoo hoo hoo"s) was a good, rocky song. The rest, as they say, is history!

Steve Barnes, Downe, Kent

We have planted our seeds. We ask that our efforts be worthy.

Loved every word of your 30 Greatest Steely Dan Songs list in MOJO 365. And I say that with the caveat that I don't agree with many of the picks, and feel you left out a dozen or two of their very best songs: everything from Rose Darling to *Gaucho*'s title song, from Midnight Cruiser to The Caves Of Altamira, from The Boston Rag to Everything Must Go, from Your Gold Teeth to Your Gold Teeth Pt 2 for heck's sake! But with writing this sharp, and funny, I also can't deny your choices, even as I would be fine never hearing Hey Nineteen ever again.

Describing King Of The World as "Drivetime music, post-apocalypse style" is genius, as is FM ("A radio staple about how radio sucks") and Bodhisattva ("Has virtuosity ever sounded so exhilarating?"). I was cackling out loud at the writing. Thank you!

Noel Mayeske, Atlanta, Georgia

I must have had a helluva good time. I wish I could remember it.

Your recent CD of Pearl Jam live rarities [MOJO 366] brought back a memory for me. I was at the Manchester gig in 2000 where Leatherman made

the cut for MOJO's CD. It was during that performance that I stupidly decided to go crowdsurfing for the first time. It just wasn't the right crowd for it (a room full of middle-aged MOJO readers?) and I ended up being walloped on the floor, which was my own stupid fault. Still, it was an absolutely fantastic performance that I was still buzzing on as I wrote up my GCSE English Literature exam the following day, unable to move my jaw. Your quotes for the letters page were taken, of course, from Cameron Crowe's Singles. Pearl Jam's State Of Love And Trust appears on the soundtrack and they played that one in Manchester that night also. Much appreciation whilst I'm here for the article on Michael Head. He's long been a hero of mine. Cheers MOJO!

Joe Mitchell, Helmshore

We've come to play for our dinner

I really enjoyed the Lenny Kravitz feature [MOJO 365]. Great reveal on his parents and their musician acquaintances, Duke Ellington and Miles Davis. French drummer Christian Vander's childhood regularly included John Coltrane's rhythm section at his parents' dinner table. I think Christian Vander's path to helm Magma would make a great movie. The first time I saw Javier Bardem as Anton Chigurh [in No Country For Old Men], I knew I was looking at the only actor on the planet who could play that role.

Robert Jones, via e-mail

You do your own thing in your own time. You should be proud.

At last, after all these years, an article on Labi Siffre [MOJO 367] – the first, surely? – in a major UK music magazine for connoisseurs of great popular music! I have been a Labi fan since 1971 and the It Must Be Love 45, and I have stuck with him ever since. I and many others have always felt he was underrated and didn't fit into any specific genre easily. So thank your lucky star…

Mike McLoughlin, via e-mail

If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him

Enjoyed Andrew Perry's Bevis Frond article and the LP review of their latest waxing *Focus On Nature* in MOJO 365. Had time to digest the platter's double helping – four sides of purple vinyl of proper songs and playing. Every track is a gem. The words of the band's songsmith Nick Saloman would give any popular music lyricist a run for their money. Climate change, Leonardo da Vinci, squats, ageing and fast food all come under the microscope. Simply put: it is a masterpiece and deserves the highest profile. Thank you MOJO for believing in The Bevis Frond, in particular Saloman. Listening to their music is, to me, life-affirming.

Mick Donovan, via e-mail

They see a free individual, it's gonna scare 'em

Lovely Anne Briggs article [MOJO 366] which prompted me to give her first album a listen. By track four I thought, Hang on, this sounds familiar. One quick rifle through my CDs, I found Go Your Way on *Raise The Roof* by Mr Plant and Ms Krauss – Anne Briggs's influence lives on well beyond her limited time recording. Big thanks for the introduction!

Jason Davies, via e-mail

A devastating blow to our antiquated systems

It's always good to hear about new material or get news on Jimi Hendrix so I was interested to read the Taking Care Of Business article in MOJO 366. However it was disappointing to see, yet again, the familiar tale of how poor the February 18, 1969 show at the Albert Hall was (usually trotted out by people that were not there). I attended this gig with a friend and, from the front stalls, we both enjoyed a fantastic performance which remains, after attending hundreds of other gigs over the intervening years, a vivid memory and one of the best shows we have ever seen. I thought that this myth had been firmly put to bed by Kris Needs in his book Just A Shot Away. Kris gives a detailed summary of the performance – which he also recalls as being brilliant (a memory backed up for him by the discovery of a recent bootleg). As far as the alleged on-stage apology and offer of refunds is concerned, we have no recollection of this and neither does it feel very credible. And Jimi was certainly not pulled off stage – we would definitely have noticed that from the third row of the stalls.

Michael Eagle, via e-mail

Did you ever wanna be somebody else?

The film quotes on the letters page of MOJO 367 are from the 1957 film Man Of A Thousand Faces, based on the life of silent movie era star Lon Chaney. The film influenced Kate Bush's song Hammer Horror.

Lee Roberts, via e-mail

I'm hip about time. But I just gotta go.

Laid up after Achilles tendon surgery, my reading material has included every issue of MOJO from 2022 and 2023. I hadn't read most of them when they came out (Don't ask why…). Reading them one after another has been wonderful, thanks to the depth of MOJO's coverage. It's a bit like reading chapters of a book. For example, from multiple issues, individual pieces when taken together tell broader stories: how Marc Bolan, David Bowie and Tony Visconti were intertwined… The echoes of Laurel Canyon via Buffalo Springfield, David Crosby, Joni Mitchell and Gram Parsons… The Beatles from way back in 1963 to the *Revolver* LP to the film Get Back. Much appreciated. Do carry on.

Jeff Ash, Green Bay, Wisconsin

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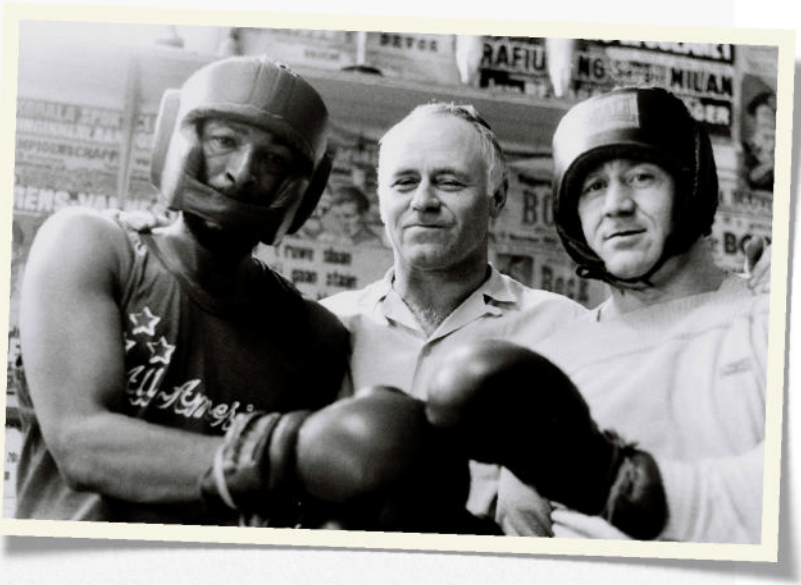


Healing powers: Prince of Motown Marvin Gaye in Ostend, Belgium, 1981; (above) Gaye boxes clever with promoter Freddy Cousaert (centre).

Ostend Blues

A hoard of unheard **Marvin Gaye** music has been found in Belgium. Plus! His unreleased jazz recordings.

"EVERY ARTICLE about Marvin Gaye starts with words beginning with 'D' – debts, divorce, drugs, depression, death. Let's put those words in the grave and bring Marvin back." So says Alex Trappeniers, a seasoned music business lawyer who has spent the past five years meticulously annotating a time capsule of 216 personal effects left by the troubled Prince of Motown from his 18-month exile in Ostend.

The tale is a familiar one. After a calamitous European tour Gaye met Belgian concert promoter Freddy Cousaert in London, in February 1981. Cousaert arranged a show at Ostend's Kursaal Casino and offered the singer a chance to detox in peace at the fifth-floor seafront apartment at Albert-I Promenade 77. Often spotted running in the dunes, playing darts or hanging out at Hotel Mercury, Gaye later spent six months renting a remote 22-room mansion house, 15 kilometres from Ostend, where he penned comeback hit Sexual Healing. In August 1982, Gaye suddenly left the villa, leaving a note to landlady Greta Mestdagh: "Sorry about the mess, do what you want with it."

That 'mess' included stage costumes, letters and handwritten lyrics, and a cache of 30 BASF chrome cassettes of Gaye working up new songs accompanied by just a Roland TR808 drum machine and small synthesizer. A short tape demo of Sexual Healing which appeared on the 1998 reissue of *Midnight Love* suggests what these may sound like: while the quality's a little rough, the arrangement, instrumentation and vocal are well developed and pure Marvin.

Trappeniers has annotated 66 songs in total, but estimates there are 38 unreleased originals. "There's enough for one very good album, if not more," he tells MOJO. The lawyer has suggested employing Bruno Mars or Mark Ronson to work on the recordings using them as building blocks in a similar way Queen worked up *Made In Heaven* from Freddie Mercury demos. But whether the recordings will see the light of day depends on whether he can thrash out a legal compromise with Gaye's estate: under Belgian law, Mestdagh owns the tapes, but not the intellectual property. Negotiations, he confirms, are ongoing.

Asked if the singer was happy in Ostend, Trappeniers pauses. "He believed he wasn't going to live much longer. He was at the height of his creative powers but rock bottom and confused as a human being." As for his return to the US in August 1982, the lawyer is unequivocal. "I think he was hijacked. CBS came to Belgium, heard Sexual Healing and went, 'Uh-oh, this is going to be massive.' He went back, but he was not ready for it."

While Gaye has already been subject of four posthumous albums – 1985's *Dream Of A Lifetime* and *Romantically Yours*, 1997's previously twice-shelved *Vulnerable* and 2019's *You're The Man* – something different is also promised this autumn. This time, it's a set of jazz standards. Rodney Trotter, lead singer in revived Motown funk band Ozone, unearthed them in a haul of early-'80s master tapes. While snippets of I Got Your Number, On A Wonderful Day Like Today and Fly Me To The Moon marry Gaye's soulful cries to fairly trad backings, Trotter promises plenty of surprises in the 25 tracks he's recovered. He likes the discovery to "finding King Tut's tomb."

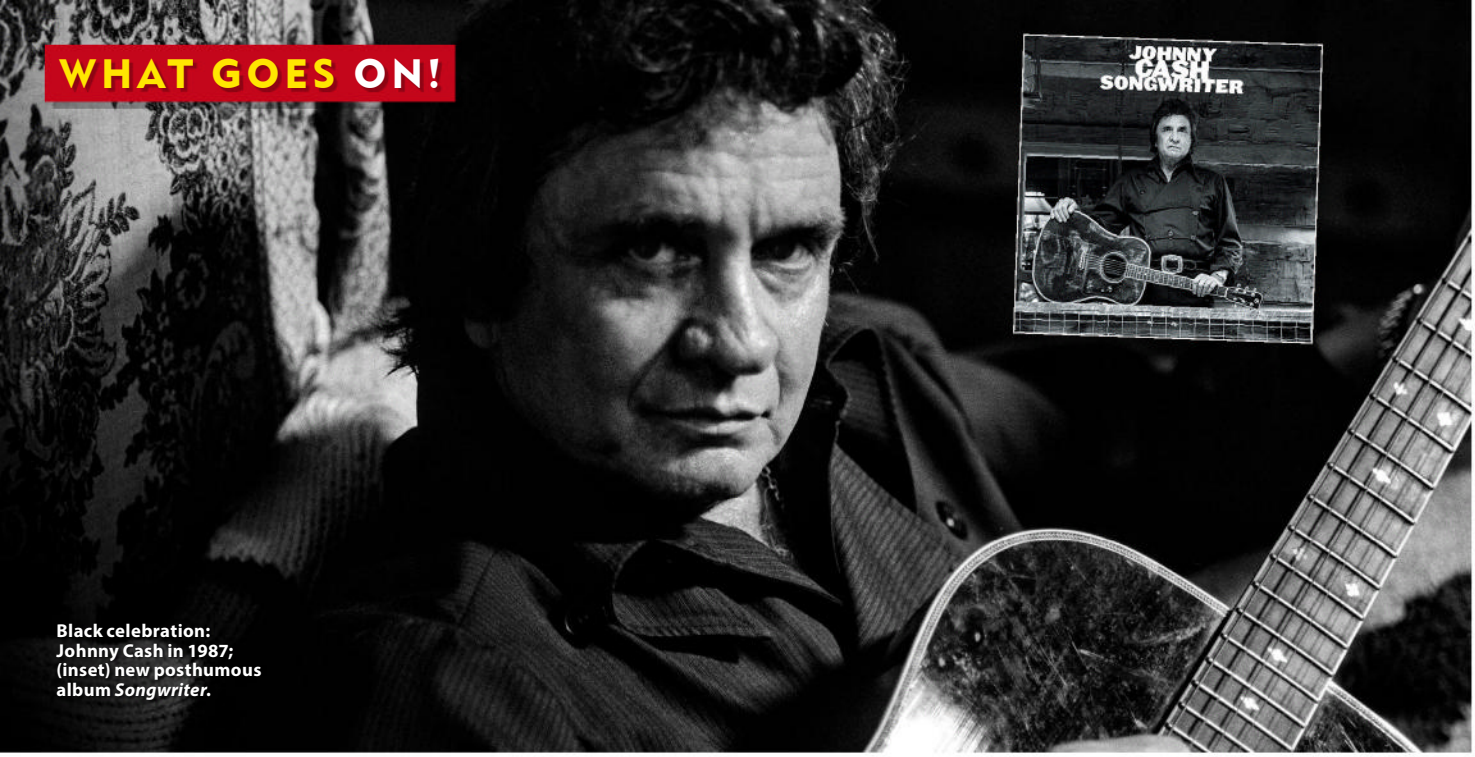
Hopefully the Ostend recordings will follow. "I feel a moral duty to make this work," says Trappeniers. "I believe Marvin left it to be rediscovered."

Andy Cowan

Richard Olivier

"He was at the height of his creative powers but rock bottom and confused as a human being."

ALEX TRAPPENIERS



Black celebration: Johnny Cash in 1987; (inset) new posthumous album *Songwriter*.

JOHNNY CASH SINGS AGAIN! ON UNHEARD DEMOS REBUILT BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

SONGWRITER IS the fifth posthumous album of unheard Johnny Cash material to be released since the Man In Black passed in 2003. And it strongly challenges the idea that his artistic powers were in decline at the time of their early-'90s creation.

Its 11 tracks are, as its title suggests, all self-compositions (in itself quite unusual for Cash) recorded at Nashville's LSI studios and his own Cash Cabin in Hendersonville, Tennessee in spring 1993 – a year prior to the first, career-resurrecting *American Recordings* album helmed by producer Rick Rubin.

Rubin told MOJO in 2022 that a dejected Cash was "surprised that anybody cared" at that juncture. His son, John Carter Cash, who co-produced *Songwriter*, begs to disagree.

"Dad certainly didn't feel that way," he says, speaking from the Cash Cabin. "He was actually in a great space at this point in his life. He'd been through a recovery centre in 1992, and that had turned his life in a positive direction. He was working hard on the road, giving everything he had, and I know because I was out there playing with him."

For these 11 tunes, the majority of which are unheard outside bootlegs, Cash did basic recording with a hastily convened band of associates at LSI. Says John, "In his mind, they were demos. The reason they haven't been out before was, the strength of his voice and the songs were there, but I felt like something needed to be done with the production."

To that end, Cash Jr says he "de-produced" the recordings, stripping out all the instruments bar his father's acoustic guitar, and built fresh rhythm tracks with trusted sidemen including early-'80s guitarist Marty Stuart and late-'80s bassist Dave Roe "surrounding his voice more simply".

Early in that process, John called in Dave Ferguson to co-produce. 'Fergie' had been the Cash Cabin engineer during Cash's twilight *American* phase and was involved in 2021's comparable reconstruction job on Tony Joe White's *Smoke From The Chimney*, alongside The Black Keys' singer-guitarist Dan Auerbach. For *Songwriter*, Auerbach provides an achingly bluesy solo on the heartbroken Spotlight. Two voicings from Cash's late fellow Highwayman Waylon Jennings were kept on (his office was across the street from LSI), while bluegrass crooner Vince Gill contributed more recently.

Such care in the re-assembly has definitely paid off, and you wonder how these performances, ranging from grittily blue-collar (Poor Valley Girl) to cosmically spiritual (Hello Out There), from playfully romantic (Well Alright) to nightmarishly war-torn (Drive On), never came out before. It's worth noting, however, that two (Drive On and Like A Soldier) were good enough to be re-cut for the first volume of the *American* series.

The quality of *Songwriter* of course begs the question: what else is in the vaults? "Ask Rick Rubin," suggests Cash Jr, intriguingly. "Rick gave Dad freedom to do whatever, he would go in and record and produce it himself, but that meant that the recordings were not necessarily in line with the *American Recordings* [sound]. There may be some of those tapes pretty close to where I'm sitting right now! But it's got to be the right time to release them.

"Right now," he concludes, "I'm just grateful for these songs, and that Dad's voice still calls to us from all those years ago."

Andrew Perry

"He was working hard… giving everything he had."
JOHN CARTER CASH

Songwriter is released on June 28 via Mercury Nashville/UMe.

GIMME FIVE... SONGS ABOUT CARS

Vince Taylor And His Playboys
Brand New Cadillac
(PARLOPHONE, 1959)

Primal Brit-rock'n'roll, where doomed, big-in-France inspiration for Ziggy Stardust Vince makes the totemic US vehicle sound like an agent of retribution. Later covered by The Clash and The Fall.

Robert Johnson
Terraplane Blues
(VOCALION, 1937)

The blues great uses the Detroit-built '30s car as a metaphor for his fear that his woman has been playing around ("Who been drivin' my Terraplane for you since I been gone?"). Luckily, he cheers up at the end.

Jack Nitzsche
Rolls Royce And Acid
(WARNER BROS, 1970)

This cue from the OST to Nic Roeg's movie Performance starts out as a serene theme for flutes until more troubling discordance seeps in. The Rolls-Royce in the film belonged to John Lennon, and had a phone and a telly in it.

Bounty Killa
Benz & The Bimma
(EAST COAST, 1996)

Co-written by Sly Dunbar, the dancehall deejay admires the design aesthetics of Mercedes-Benz, Lexus and BMW. For more ragga moto-appreciation, see also Beenie Man's Who Am I and all songs using the 'Range Rover' rhythm.

Collapsed Lung
Thundersley Invacar
(DECEPTIVE, 1993)

Essex hip-hoppers behind '96 hit Eat My Goal pay tribute to the three-wheel microcar given out free to disabled drivers by the NHS until the '70s, sampling Victor Lewis-Smith and rapping by BBC 5 Live presenter Nihal Arthanayake.

Alan Messer

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TO ALL TRAINS
TOUCH AND GO RECORDS LP / CD

THE BAND. It's still: Steve Albini ◊ Guitar. Todd Trainer ◊ Drums. Bob Weston ◊ Bass. DATA. This is Shellac's sixth studio LP.

COWTOWN
FEAR OF...
GRINGO RECORDS LP

First album in 8 years from Leeds Devo-esque DIY punk trio, full of three minute pop blasts. Have previously toured with Deerhoof and Quasi.

KEE AVIL
SPINE
CONSTELLATION 180G LP / CD

The follow-up to their acclaimed 2022 debut pushes deeper into spartan and superbly carved post-punk guitar + electronic songcraft. 180gram vinyl art edition includes set of six 12x12 insert prints.

HOW TO DRESS WELL
I AM TOWARD YOU
SARGENT HOUSE LP / CD

LA-based musician Tom Krell returns with I Am Toward You, the first new album in 6 years. With some of his noisiest, most free, & poetic music to date, Krell opens the 2nd decade of his career with an album that delivers on the hallmarks of his best work.

LIONLIMB
LIMBO
BAYONET RECORDS LP

'Limbo' is another masterful expression of Lionlimb's lush, psychedelic, chamber-pop. The album is incredibly easy to be engulfed by, brimming with lavish instrumentation, slide guitars, shimmering piano, synths, tape loops and strings.

FINOM
NOT GOD
JOYFUL NOISE RECORDINGS LP / CD

Not God is the new album from Chicago's beloved two-headed monster, Finom (fka Ohmme). Produced by Jeff Tweedy in the Wilco Loft, Not God is a marvel of growth.

JIMI TENOR & COLD DIAMOND & MINK
IS THERE LOVE IN OUTER SPACE?
TIMMION RECORDS LP / CD

Full of cosmic soul ballads & funky psychedelia. Throughout the album Jimi's seasoned artistry shines through, showcasing his ability to blend celestial sounds with gritty moondust funk.

STRAND OF OAKS
MIRACLE FOCUS
WESTERN VINYL LP / CD

Strand of Oaks embraces electronics on Miracle Focus with a sound that Pitchfork says "...melds the synth and guitar tones of the Cure with the upcountry jangle of Tom Petty."

GOOD LOOKS
LIVED HERE FOR A WHILE
KEELED SCALES LP / CD

The follow-up to Good Looks' critically acclaimed 2022 debut Bummer Year, Lived Here For A While builds out their Americana sound with clanging post-punk guitars and expansive indie rock.

BLOOMSDAY
HEART OF THE ARTICHOKE
BAYONET RECORDS LP / CD

Bloomsday writes spacious, full-bodied folk songs that feel like somewhere between a mirror and a memory. 'Heart of the Artichoke' is a relic of unfettered creativity and community, and is an ode to all things that are good, no matter how small.

TYMON DOGG & THE DACOITS
THE GRANADA SESSIONS
TINY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS LP / CD

Backed by Richard Dudanski (PiL, Raincoats, 101'ers) and three members from Spanish legends Lagartija Nick, The Granada Sessions is odd rock brilliance in the style Tymon's former band, The Mescaleros.

MUI ZYU
NOTHING OR SOMETHING TO DIE FOR
FATHER/DAUGHTER RECORDS LP / CD

Like the psychedelic tones of Ryuichi Sakamoto or the eerie wanderings of Angelo Badalamenti, the sophomore album from mui zyu expertly toes the line between disorder and clarity.

ADAM ROSS
LITTORAL ZONE
FIKA RECORDINGS LP / CD

A heavily lyrical collection of warped 70s-esque indie-folk ballads from Randolph's Leap frontman, surrounded by Scottish Album Of The Year Award nominated composer & multi-instrumentalist Andrew Wasylyk's deft production.

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String theory: Pat Metheny gets under the tones on his new album.

FACT SHEET

Title: *MoonDial*
Due: July 26
Production: Pat Metheny
Songs: La Crosse/We Can't See It, But It's There/This Belongs To You/Angel Eyes
The Buzz: "Performances are quick. Listening to all of them takes much longer, because I take a lot of notes and I want to find a really good version – to really go deep inside a tune." *Pat Metheny*

PAT METHENY, JAZZ GUITAR MASTER, PRESENTS LP 55

"THERE ARE tunes that invoke kind of an endless sense of possibility," jazz guitar maestro Pat Metheny tells MOJO. "Doing this, you're kind of in the infinity business, you know? You're looking for that *thing*."

He's been looking for that thing for more than 50 years now, with a massive and diverse back catalogue, collaborations with Bowie, Joni and Ornette Coleman, and 20 Grammys to show for it. His latest album *MoonDial*, though, has what he calls "very mundane" origins just before his solo tour for 2023's moment-catching, guitars-only album *Dream Box*.

"I'd had a nylon string baritone guitar for years that I just couldn't find the right strings for," he explains, "because I tune baritone guitars in an extremely weird way. Then a few days before I left to go on tour, I heard about an Argentine company called Magma that were making a new kind of string. I ordered some, put them on this baritone guitar, and – and this has happened to me a couple times over the years – in milliseconds, a whole universe opened up of stuff that I had not really gotten to before through an instrument, especially in terms of harmony. The strings have maybe a little rounder kind of sound, much more forgiving than a steel string."

"Doing this, you're kind of in the infinity business."
PAT METHENY

With new, instrumental possibilities manifesting naturally in concert, in November he used his first time off for four months to retreat alone to upstate New York and record *MoonDial*. "It doesn't really even have a name," he says of the studio space. "It's just a room. You don't need anything too fancy to do a solo guitar record, just a reasonable sounding room and a really great mike [an AEA R88], and a little bit of time."

He estimates work took 10 days. "I just kind of stayed awake as long as I could and worked on playing a tune a bunch of times, and then I would record it and then live with it for a day and then do it again the next day. Almost all of it was recorded in the middle of the night, and it was very cold outside. Somehow that vibe is in the music, I think."

He compares what came out to past solo baritone guitar albums *One Quiet Night* (2003) and covers set *What's It All About* (2011). On *MoonDial*, Metheny originals meet old standards including the Fabs' Here, There And Everywhere, Bernstein's Somewhere and beloved Irish trad theme Londonderry Air. "I like playing the songs that I used to listen to when I was driving to gigs when I was first starting out around Kansas City," says Metheny. "The tunes that we call standards are standards for a reason – you can pound on them all day long, look at them this way, that way, upside down, backwards and forwards, and they retain whatever that thing is that makes them that thing… they're robust to the point of almost indestructibility."

He adds that he has another three records he's working on: a third album from his Side-Eye group project, a trio album featuring Ron Carter and another solo guitar set. "It's turned out to be one of my favourite settings to perform in," he says. "Makes me wish I had been practising on the guitar much more across the years."

Ian Harrison

Pat Metheny tours Europe from October, and plays the EFG London Jazz Festival at the Barbican on November 16, 2024.

ALSO WORKING

…**ELVIS COSTELLO** and singing bluegrass siblings **Larkin Poe** have been spotted in a recording studio in Nashville …speaking to the FT, **MICHAEL STIPE** (right) reflected on making a new LP. "Songwriting and lyric writing in particular are fucking hard and require a lot of patience… the record will be completed this year for sure and then I'll release it" …film has emerged of British reggae greats **THE CIMARONS** recording at Ladbroke Grove's West Eleven Recording studios …**FONTAINES D.C.** release their fourth LP, *Romance*, on August 23. Recorded in London and Paris, with **James Ford** producing, bassist **Conor Deegan** observes, "We've always had this sense of idealism and romance. Each album gets further away from observing that through the lens of Ireland" …**RY COODER** has shared footage of himself playing in his backyard to a variety of plants …**STEVE HILLAGE** has revealed that a new LP by his and **Miquette Giraudy**'s Mirror System project arrives in autumn, adding, "New **System 7** LP to follow after that" …said **RINGO** last month, "I was gonna do a country EP, but as things are unfolding, it's probably gonna be… 10 tracks, can you believe it?" He added that he's been working with **Linda Perry** of **4 Non Blondes** …**MARY J. BLIGE** (left) told People that she's currently in the studio recording what will "probably my last studio album" …**DR DRE** announced on Jimmy Kimmel Live that **Eminem** will release a new LP this year. "I've got songs on it and it's fire," Dre added…

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All eyes on me: John Grant and (below) his beloved Petoskey rock.

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4 **The Flying Lizards** *Money* (VIRGIN, 1979)
5 **Telex** *Drama Drama* (ARIOLA, 1981)

John Grant

Michigan's human synthesizer talks lava, famous friends and loving 1970s AOR.

AS MOJO CALLS John Grant at his home in Reykjavik in April, we wonder: is he anywhere near the lava currently erupting around Iceland? "It's definitely going on," he says airily, "but not everywhere. I'm sitting pretty comfortably in my room."

He's got his own conflagration on the way: *The Art Of The Lie*, the next chapter in the solo canon which began with 2010's five-star 'Instant MOJO Classic' *Queen Of Denmark*, is imminent. Within he deals with the unending hellishness of life both personal and political with barbed humours, analogue electronics and a full soft rock/funk band. An extra dimension of purgatory arrives when MOJO's recording device packs up, unbeknownst, eight minutes into our interview. Like a mensch, Grant obligingly comes back on the phone without complaint.

Sorry for making you do this interview twice.

Well, sometimes the universe says to you, quite clearly, well what the fuck do you know, buddy? You do your best to have all your fucking ducks in a row. And it still doesn't work. You just can't fucking win sometimes.

Have you won with *The Art Of The Lie*?

Yeah, I'm very happy with it. I mean, I've sort of moved on already – I've heard it thousands of times now – but in a live context, that's where the songs really come alive again.

One stand-out song is Father. What's the story behind that?

We'd gone back for my grandmother's funeral in Michigan. Growing up, her house was right across the street from ours. And as we were leaving to go back to the airport, my brother and I saw that our old house, that my father built with his own hands, was sitting empty across the street. The people who lived there had just moved out. It was completely dark on the inside, with this beautiful light snow falling. And my brother said, "Come on, let's go in there." And I walked through the house of my childhood for one last time. It was such a profound experience for me, I just had to write a song about it. It percolated inside me for quite a long time.

Why did it come out now?

I've been doing a lot of thinking about my father. He's in his mid-eighties now. I thought about what a difficult time I have understanding his political leanings, and the religious stuff, which was the prism through which my homosexuality was judged. And then, I just remember my father in this old Methodist Church where he taught Sunday school, sometimes in the entrance hall he'd squat and sort of hold out his arms for me to run into. I was thinking about how much I missed that. As you get older, you see how hard it is to change things about yourself, and you have to look at your parents as people who are flawed, who are also the product of the times they lived in.

"Playing ping pong with Grace Jones is fun."
JOHN GRANT

***The Art Of The Lie* was produced by Ivor Guest, who's a Viscount, and you are pals with Sir Elton. Do you have a glamorous life?**

No. You know, hanging out and playing ping pong with Grace Jones at her apartment, or hanging out with Elton John in all these beautiful places, it is fun. They've turned out to be really interesting, lovely people. But you still yearn for your old friends and you still go back to your own life, to your apartment. It's not real life.

You're obsessed with electronics. Might you ever go back to acoustic instrumentation?

Well, I sort of get a little attitude about that. I haven't been forgiven by people who really loved *Queen Of Denmark* – I think, you know, MOJO has been disappointed in me since then. I still love 1970s AOR to within an inch of its life, but I also love sound design and synthesizers, and trying to distil all of these different elements into one cohesive whole for myself to make my own voice. That world of sound design is just fascinating, I mean, the vocoder to me has a very melancholy, sad sound, like the future mourning the past.

Tell us something you've never told an interviewer before.

I'm obsessed with my Petoskey stone [a rock of fossilised coral peculiar to Michigan]. In the '70s we used to spend time in [holiday destination] Petoskey, we used to go swimming, motorbiking, water-skiing, and I learned about Petoskey stones. When I went out into the world, I forgot all about them. Then when I went back to Petoskey several years ago, I got myself a fucking Petoskey stone, for crying out loud. It's beautiful!

As told to Ian Harrison

The Art Of The Lie is out on Bella Union on June 14. John Grant tours the UK in October.

Hordur Sveinsson

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LAST NIGHT A RECORD CHANGED MY LIFE

Cherie Currie

The Runaways singer genuflects before David Bowie's Diamond Dogs (RCA Victor, 1974).

It was the days of blacklight posters and incense. I was a surfer chick and I liked John Denver and Barry Manilow. My twin sister Marie was the very popular, prettier and cooler one, I was just very innocent, introvert, the runt. When you're 14, 15, trying to find your identity, it's difficult when you're a twin.

I was in my bedroom in Encino with my friend Paul L'Esperance, and he brought *Diamond Dogs* for me. I literally escaped, then. It was like watching a sci-fi movie in my head, one I could be in. Every song took you to a different place and allowed you to re-imagine yourself. The bisexuality – my gosh, being the daughter of a World War Two gunny sergeant, I wasn't raised with that kind of freedom. I became the biggest David Bowie fan, I wanted to be like him, dress like him and cut my hair like him. I impersonated him for our junior high school talent show, doing 1984, and I won!

After that, the Bowie show at the Universal Amphitheatre [in '74] was my very first concert. I'll never forget it – everybody was dressed like aliens, one man was wearing a spacesuit with clear platform boots with live goldfish in them. Under the stars, the skies opened and I knew that I wanted to be a stage performer. It made me braver and I walked out a different person. I'd been raped, and when I decided to take on David Bowie, it was to escape myself as well, I think.

[In The Runaways] Joan Jett was Suzi Quatro, I was David Bowie, and that's what we used until we could find out who we were. I met him when he came to a Runaways show in Boston, with Iggy Pop. I just said, I'm such a huge fan and if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be there. He was very complimentary and kind. He allowed me to find who I am, and that's a gift that you can never repay.

As told to Ian Harrison

Cherie Currie tours the UK and Ireland from November.

THE MAGNETIC FIELDS PLAY *69 LOVE SONGS* IN FULL!

"I'M JUST waking up, so if I behave erratically that's why", Stephin Merritt tells MOJO. Sporting a 'Rock Me Amadeus' T-shirt, The Magnetic Fields' linchpin has risen to talk about *69 Love Songs*, the epic and wondrous triple-LP he'll be performing in its entirety at this year's Edinburgh Festival and at London's Barbican. "Sometimes audiences don't seem to understand we are performing the songs in order and they call out requests," Merritt notes, lugubriously. "But I have an official response to requests, which is – Fuck off."

Merritt will celebrate *69 Love Songs*' 25th anniversary as part of a septet which includes two of the original LP's guest singers, Claudia Gonson and Shirley Simms. Gonson's also on piano alongside Chris Ewen (synth), Sam Davol (cello), John Woo (guitars; banjo) and Anthony Kaczynski (acoustic guitar; vocals). Merritt will play hand percussion and sing.

"For Yeah! Oh Yeah!, Claudia and I are in a duet where I play a husband who is about to kill his wife," he says. "We make it maximally theatrical on-stage, climbing ladders while we sing. Breath control is only part of the challenge when you've a mike in one hand and you're clinging to a ladder with the other."

69 Love Songs was originally conceived as a music revue wherein four drag queens sang its arch, acerbic songs while competing each night for a $100 prize. "But I realised that in order to teach performers the songs I might as well make an album," Merritt explains.

"Our motto while making it was '…Or it's done,'" he adds. "It seemed necessary to get in and get out as quickly as possible, partly because of the sheer volume of songs, but also because it's essentially 69 different genres, some of which we had more affinity for than others. Our versions don't sound like the definitive ones, and that's been great for people covering the songs."

True enough, Peter Gabriel, Tracey Thorn, Fleet Foxes' Robin Pecknold and many others have tackled *69 Love Songs* material. Does Merritt have a favourite cover? "I don't and if I did I would certainly never tell anyone," he retorts. "Favourite things are for 10-year-olds."

Is there anything he'd do differently now? "I would have much less emphasis on jealousy in a monogamous context," he says. "I was writing in the East Village in the late 1990s, when HIV was killing people at a fast rate. Gay men had a lot more expectation of monogamy, whereas now that's rare; considered kind of eccentric. My background culture has completely changed."

Re now, Merritt says he's pondering a companion LP to 2020's concision-rich *Quickies*. "That came out during lockdown and didn't have a chance to culturally osmose, so it's occurred to me to do *Quickies II*, both to draw attention to *Quickies*, and because since Covid I've found it difficult to finish songs.

"My neurologist says my temporal lobe is out of phase with the rest of my brain," he reveals. "It's associated with writer's block and other neurological disorders, and there's a respectable theory that people who have it found religions. I've been thinking about what religion I would found, but fortunately for everyone my brain's too disorganised right now to decide. When I get up on my pedestal I'm sure I'll have plenty to say, though."

James McNair

"We make it maximally theatrical on-stage."
STEPHIN MERRITT

The Magnetic Fields play 69 Love Songs at The Queen's Hall as part of The Edinburgh International Festival in August, and then at the Barbican.

Juan Perez Fajardo, Marcelo Krasilcic, MarkYnys-Mon

On the pull: The Magnetic Fields (from left) Chris Ewen, Anthony Kaczynski, Stephin Merritt, Claudia Gonson, Sam Davol see red; (above) Merritt prepares to spread the *Love*.

Lady stardust: Dana Gillespie with David Bowie, May 17, 1971; (below) Britain's queen of the blues now.

FROM POP TO BLUES, AND DYLAN TO BOWIE, DANA GILLESPIE RESTS HER CASE

"THAT'S THE thing about old age," reflects Dana Gillespie. "You can get away with anything. If you don't like it– naff off."

Feisty in conversation, on-stage and in song, it appears that she's always done what she has wanted. And what escapades this 75-year-old descendant of Austrian nobility and Norfolk landowners has experienced, from taking drum lessons in London's red-light zone of Soho in 1962 aged just 13, before frequenting the area's blues clubs (she first saw The Yardbirds, "or was it The Action? It was a long time ago") and releasing her first single Thank You Boy in 1965. She now has over 70 albums under her belt, most in the rambunctious idiom of the blues.

"I must thank my liberal, intelligent parents," says the woman born Richenda Antoinette de Winterstein Gillespie. "But if they had forbidden me, I'd have done it anyway."

Her action and people-packed life is newly documented on *First Love*, an album of covers (bar the self-penned First Love, Last Love) made with friends/co-producers/instigators Marc Almond and Tris Penna. "It's such a different record for me," Gillespie notes. "I'd never have thought of covering Lana Del Rey or Leonard Cohen. But it was wonderful to hand over the reins after writing and producing 90 per cent myself since the '70s."

Whilst singer Almond and record label veteran Penna also suggested the likes of Fleetwood Mac's Dreams and Morrissey's Spent The Day In Bed ("We've never met, but Morrissey wrote to me saying, 'Your version is far better than mine!'") to reflect Gillespie's personality, her own choices include Can You Hear Me and Not Dark Yet, written respectively by friends/lovers Bowie and Dylan.

"First Love, Last Love is partly concerned with men that I've known," she says, "some who played a part in my musical evolution." She first met Bowie at the Marquee in 1964, and Dylan in 1965, "back when record companies held receptions." She sang backing on It Ain't Easy from *The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars*, and Bowie famously wrote Andy Warhol for her, "though I still don't know why, it's about as abstract a lyric as you can get."

Gillespie joined Bowie at manager Tony Defries' star-making MainMan organisation, but she wanted to act too; playing Mary Magdalene in London's original production of Jesus Chris Superstar delayed her provocatively titled RCA album debut *Weren't Born A Man* until 1974, by which time glam was fading fast. But Gillespie knew how to stay the course. "A singing teacher told me, 'after a gig, go immediately home!' Otherwise, the adrenalin pumps and it can ruin your voice. Acting auditions also meant you had to be on the ball. I think I got my discipline from water-skiing."

Who would have thought Britain's junior water-skiing champion of 1962 – for it was she – would become Britain's queen of the blues? "I've always known I could sing the blues until the bitter end," she says. "Until my voice goes, or I fall off the stage."

Martin Aston

DANA FROM HEAVEN

Gillespie's three of the best.

Foolish Seasons
(LONDON, 1968)

Reflecting the times, Gillespie's debut is alternately wistful and robust folk-pop, much like a London Françoise Hardy, covering the likes of Donovan and Michel Polnareff, but with two songs of her own, including the autumnal title track.

Weren't Born A Man
(RCA, 1974)

With pin-up cover portrait to match, Gillespie's RCA debut didn't pull any lyrical punches, whilst its crunchy rock and orchestrated ballads (arranged by co-producer Mick Ronson) mirrored Bowie's own. All but Andy Warhol and Third World War's Stardom Road are her own compositions.

Blues It Up
(ACE, 1990)

An excellent entry point to her swinging retro blues style, with 23 tracks picked from her LPs *Blue Job*, *Below The Belt* and *Sweet Meat*. Savour the innuendo (My Man Stands Out; King Size Papa; Big Ten Inch Record) and a hot time is guaranteed.

> "I think I got my discipline from water-skiing."
> **DANA GILLESPIE**

Christina Jansen, Getty

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Freedom to roam: Oisín Leech is drawn to songs that "inhabit a dreamworld".

> "The influence there was David Bowie's *Low* and Miles Davis's *In A Silent Way*."
> **OISÍN LEECH**

GHOSTS, FAMINE ROADS AND BOB DYLAN'S BASSIST: ENTER THE DREAMWORLD OF OISÍN LEECH

OISÍN LEECH has lived a life surrounded by music. "I was lucky growing up," says the red-headed 43-year-old singer-songwriter from a bedroom in his family home in Navan, County Meath. "My mum and dad are both singers who surrounded us with music but never forced it on us. They'd just let the magic be around us. When I was messing about in punk bands as a kid, my grandmother, who grew up in the famed Plaza Ballroom in Buncrana, would always stress the importance of melody."

From melodic punk gigs in his shed aged 14 and trips to UK street punk festivals, Leech moved into the world of folk, thanks to the gift of Bob Dylan's *Nashville Skyline* from his uncle. Then the discovery of The Coral's 2003 LP, *Magic And Medicine*, resulted in a pilgrimage to Liverpool, where Leech became a regular busker on Church Street before fronting Scouse jangle-rock four-piece 747s, who were briefly signed to Island Records.

"I thought I'd maybe spend a few months in Liverpool and go back to Ireland. But first there was the 747s and then around 2005 I met [fellow Irish ex-pat] Mark McCausland. We formed The Lost Brothers and ended up making seven albums and touring for 15 years."

Through a love of the Everlys, Louvin Brothers and Simon & Garfunkel, Leech and McCausland created an Irish-Americana duo adept at haunting close-harmony ballads and desolate gothic imagery. However, following an enforced pandemic hiatus, Leech began working on his own songs. Sequestered at Joey Procida's, the folk club he co-owns in Navan, he began experimenting with open tuning, singing in a new vocal register and drawing on the poems of Seamus Heaney and Patrick Kavanagh.

"These new songs felt different, more personal, more vulnerable than anything I'd written before," he explains. The 15 years spent touring and the seven spent running Joey Procida's had also put Leech in touch with a group of revered fellow musicians who he enlisted to help him realise this new direction, including singer-songwriter M Ward, Planxty's Dónal Lunny, fiddle-player Róisín McGrory and Bob Dylan's long-term bassist and 'musical director' Tony Garnier.

"I met Tony on tour years ago and we became musical pen pals. He's incredibly inspiring. When he heard my demo of the song Colour Of The Rain, the first thing he said was, 'I hear a bass part'."

Anyone who listens to the finished album, *Cold Sea*, is drawn not just to the sombre quality of the songs and the sympathetic playing of Garnier, Lunny, McGrory and Ward, but also the unique guitar sound and spare, ethereal production of Pennsylvania-born singer-songwriter and MOJO favourite, Steve Gunn.

"Steve was my first choice as producer," says Leech. "And when I suggested recording in Donegal he said, 'I'm in! My great granny's from Downings!', which is right in the middle of Donegal."

Recorded in an old schoolhouse on the side of a mountain, alongside a 19th century famine road (built by a starving workforce in exchange for food between 1840 and 1870), *Cold Sea* is an otherworldly album suffused with ghosts, its six dreamlike introspective songs and three instrumental soundscapes sequenced so as to give the impression of a slow fade to nothingness, as if the story being told is being left unfinished.

"The influence there was definitely David Bowie's *Low* but also Miles Davis's *In A Silent Way*," says Leech. "We had other, more direct songs we could have put on the album, but we left them off. I'm drawn to songs and records that live in a place between the living and the waking life, songs that evade a direct meaning and inhabit a dreamworld. They leave a space for the imagination to roam."

Andrew Male

Oisín Leech's Cold Sea is out now on Outside Music/Tremone.

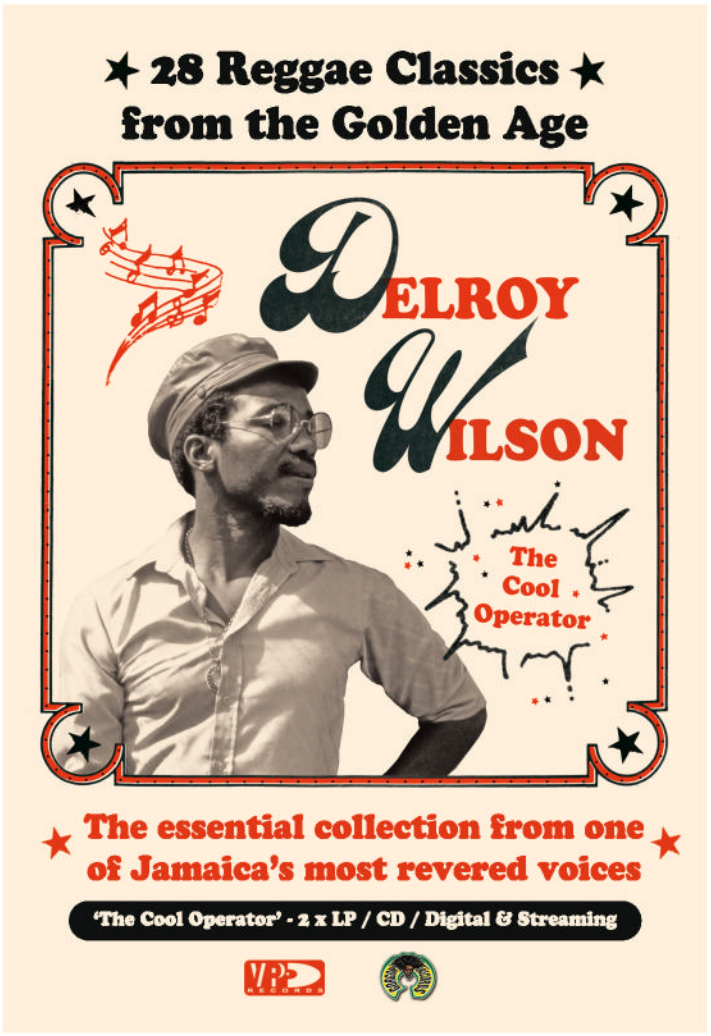
FACT SHEET

- For fans of: Richard Hawley, Steve Gunn, The Coral, Jackson C Frank
- Leech's great uncle was the famed Irish actor Richard Aherne, who played opposite Humphrey Bogart in the 1943 film Sahara. "Bogart was my uncle's best man at his wedding," says Leech. "He lived in Hollywood's Knickerbocker Hotel until the end of his life."
- The track Maritime Radio grew out of an impromptu Steve Gunn instrumental to test the equipment. "I grabbed the radio when the shipping forecast came on, held it up to the mike and hit 'record'. That track is a snapshot of the magical atmosphere when we were making that record."

KEY TRACKS

- Colour Of The Rain
- Trawbreaga Bay
- Maritime Radio

Ellius Grace



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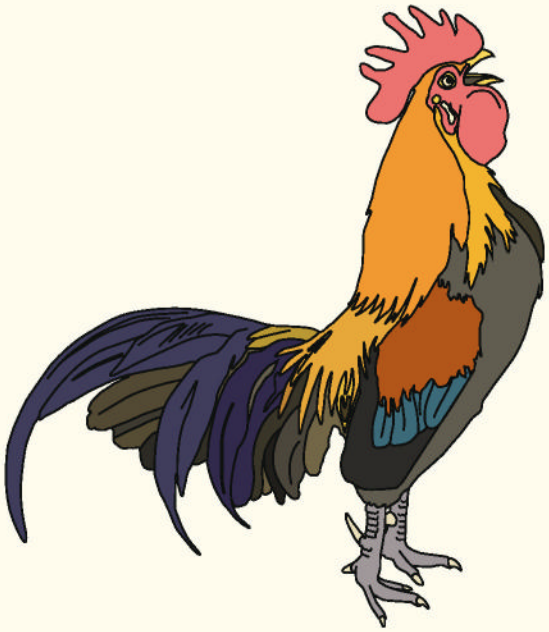

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MEET AIRCOOLED, THE BRITPOP AND TECHNO VETS RECHANNELLING THEIR ENERGIES INTO A KRAUT-FUNK PARTY

"THE GREATEST Kraut-gospel-funk party album ever," promised MOJO when we reviewed the second Aircooled album, *Eat The Gold*, a couple of issues ago. But to hit that jackpot, the four members of the South Coast band soldiered through decades of service in disparate, often unheralded corners of British music.

Synth player and co-vocalist Riz Maslen, for instance, started out singing with early-'90s electronicists The Future Sound Of London, then moonlighted with The Beloved and 4Hero before working long-term with Ninja Tune under the solo alias Neotropic. Living in the musical hotbed of Hastings and St Leonards just before the pandemic, she was introduced to Oliver Cherer, another below-the-radar trooper who first materialised in the late-'90s big beat act Cooler, alongside EMF's James Atkin, and had recently supersubbed in Piroshka, alongside Miki Berenyi from Lush.

Cherer was looking to follow up a solo record he'd made in 2017 called *Music For Aircooled Motoring* as Australian Testing Labs Inc. To that end, he enlisted Justin Welch, erstwhile drummer with Britpop heroes Elastica, who'd recently relocated to East Sussex and joined a brief Lush reunion, then Piroshka and, since 2021, The Jesus And Mary Chain.

"My idea was to do two tracks," Cherer recalls, "each a Krautrock groove filling up one side of vinyl. I thought Justin would just give me some loops, but he took it on as a challenge to do two 20-minute takes. We eventually decided to edit them down and write a couple more tracks. Once live music was back, we thought it'd be fun to play the stuff out at this place Tommy's Pizza, so we called in our friend Katharine Wallinger [Wedding Present, Viv Albertine, also local] on bass. We were just going to do that one show."

> "Nobody's at the front. There's no manifesto. It really could go anywhere."
> **OLIVER CHERER, AIRCOOLED**

Under the snappier handle Aircooled, their 2022 *St Leopards* album and the live shows were received with sufficient enthusiasm for these four journeymen-and-women to keep pursuing it. Their initial jams had been inspired by Neu!, La Düsseldorf and Harmonia, but with Cherer choogling over the top like Ripley Johnson from the Rose City Band. Suitably emboldened, they went straight into making *Eat The Gold* with an open mind, which this time led to them singing on four tracks. "It started off with either me or Ollie singing lead, with harmonies and backing vocals," Maslen explains, "but we realised that putting the two together, so there's actually no lead singer, really worked for us."

The resulting six shorter pieces are punchier, with No Reason To Lie in particular crunching dancefloor rock reminiscent of '80s deviants Trouble Funk or, as Cherer suggests, "Led Zeppelin playing Talking Heads".

Is it original? Is anyone bothered, when Aircooled sound so infectiously abandoned to the task of instigating good times? "I've never laughed so much in a band before," Cherer beams. "Nobody is at the front. There's no manifesto, and it really could go anywhere. There will probably always be some motorik stuff, some funk, something more ambient, a bit of singing, a bit of not-singing – who knows, maybe some three-minute synth-pop? There's no plan. It's *now* that counts, right?"

Andrew Perry

St Leopards and Eat The Gold are out now on Music's Not Dead.

Gary Miller/Getty Images

Going with the flow: Aircooled (from left) Riz Maslen, Katharine Wallinger, Oliver Cherer, Justin Welch.

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: Neu!, Trouble Funk, Tom Tom Club
- Aircooled have played barely 20 gigs, yet already squeezed in tour supports with Suede and The Jesus And Mary Chain. "Arriving for the first JAMC show," says Cherer, "they whisked Riz on-stage to soundcheck Just Like Honey."
- Riz's days with The Future Sound Of London were formative. "They were always saying, 'Do your own music, Riz!' So I did Neotropic and toured the world with all the Ninja Tune bands. Being a woman, I learnt from those experiences and now I don't take any shit. We've each done it all before, so for us, it's just, Why don't we pool the skills we have, keep that DIY ethos, and have a blast?"

KEY TRACKS

- Airports
- No Reason To Lie
- Tommy's Strut

MOJO PLAYLIST

Listen up! For the month's garage howls, thrill-themes and goth-pop.

1 NEIL YOUNG & CRAZY HORSE CORTEZ THE KILLER
San Diego, April 24, and Neil opens the Horse's comeback tour with a tectonic 15-minute Cortez, reinstating lost verses left on the cutting room floor 50 years ago.
Find it: *YouTube*

2 PAUL McCARTNEY & THE EAGLES LET IT BE
Played at a Jimmy Buffett tribute at the Hollywood Bowl, Macca soulfully reprises the secular hymn with heavy friends, noting that he sang it to the ailing Jimmy before he died.
Find it: *YouTube*

3 THOM YORKE KNIFE EDGE
The theme to Italian thriller Confidenza, hazy voice and keys balance tenderness with mania: "this to me is life or death."
Find it: *YouTube*

4 LINDA THOMPSON FEAT. JOHN GRANT JOHN GRANT
Deliciously meta: written by Thompson about meeting Grant, sung by Grant, brimming with poignant wit.
Find it: *streaming services*

5 JAKE XERXES FUSSELL GOING TO GEORGIA
Less a folk revivalist, more a transmigrator of old words into new bodies, his latest blends warmth, delicacy and a circling guitar hook.
Find it: *Bandcamp*

6 HIFI SEAN & DAVID McALMONT SAD BANGER
The sublime voice of McAlmont glides over melancholy electro pumpery rich in above-the-clouds swoon. From new LP *Daylight*.
Find it: *streaming services*

7 EIKO ISHIBASHI SMOKE
From the score to Ryusuke Hamaguchi's brilliant Evil Does Not Exist movie, Ishibashi locates the unnerving sweet spot between Henryk Górecki and *In A Silent Way*.
Find it: *Bandcamp*

8 WARRINGTON-RUNCORN NEW TOWN DEVELOPMENT PLAN A SHARED SENSE OF PURPOSE (VINCE CLARKE REMIX)
A rain-soaked electronic lament for a lost concrete future, like missing the last bus at the end of the world.
Find it: *streaming services*

9 POPULATION: 5 CARNIVAL OF SATELLITES
Anglo-Portuguese garage rockers rage at the prospect of big-biz launching into space, with theremin. From their self-titled LP.
Find it: *SoundCloud*

10 CASSANDRA JENKINS DELPHINIUM BLUE
Enigmatic gothic pop with ambient jazz washes and a breath-on-glass croon. Think Sharon Van Etten channelling The Blue Nile.
Find it: *streaming services*

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The Roots' Renaissance Man of Rhythm on Fallon, Sly, Amy, addiction (to vinyl), Pete Townshend's J Dilla fetish, and what makes him run so hard, so fast. "You don't figure out what's next," says Questlove. "You just do it."

Interview by **DAVID FRICKE** • Portrait by **LEON BENNETT**

"I'M WAY PAST DEADLINE," QUESTLOVE confesses with a smile and a sigh as he looks intently at the television screen suspended over a dining table in his apartment. The picture-window view from his perch in a lower-Manhattan skyscraper goes to Brooklyn and beyond. But the producer, DJ, author, filmmaker and founding drummer of hip-hop institution The Roots is glued to the new, opening sequence – a rapid-fire montage of interview clips and kinetic live footage – for his documentary on the kamikaze R&B genius Sly Stone, the follow-up to Questlove's 2021 Academy Award-winning debut as a director, Summer Of Soul.

"I'm realising that every project I work on has a surprise element," he says, turning off the TV and jumping right into three, winding hours of knockout anecdotes, acute musical analysis and candid, personal reflection for MOJO. "With Summer Of Soul, you learn one thing: 'Oh, I didn't know a music festival happened in Harlem [in 1969].' But you also learn that black joy is as important as the black tears and bloodshed of the civil rights movement." In turn, "This Sly doc isn't really about Sly," Questlove warns. "It's about why artists self-sabotage."

Questlove, 53, is too busy and jubilant in the workload to get in his own way – literally "the king of 'yes'" as he puts it in his latest book, Hip-Hop Is History, a roller-coaster guide to the author's life in the music since he was six years old, hearing the Sugarhill Gang's Rapper's Delight on the radio in Philadelphia. Today, Questlove reveals that within two weeks of winning his Oscar, he agreed to direct another six films. Meanwhile, The Roots are "damn near 80 per cent done" with their first LP in 10 years and have "four songs on the back burner" for a project with fellow Philly icon Todd Rundgren. And that's on top of Questlove's productions for other artists, DJ bookings and The Roots' 15 years on TV as the house band for talk-show host Jimmy Fallon, the last 10 of them on The Tonight Show.

Born Ahmir Thompson, Questlove comes from doo-wop royalty with bonus hip-hop cred. His father was the namesake vocal star of Lee Andrews And The Hearts – Long Lonely Nights (1957); Tear Drops (1958) – while an album by Congress Alley, his parents' '70s funk band, was sampled by Dr. Dre for his 1992 blockbuster, *The Chronic*. Questlove attended arts and music schools but was already road-tested as his dad's drummer and bandleader when he started freestyling on the Philly streets with a classmate – rapper-lyricist Tariq Trotter, AKA Black Thought – creating a fusion of live drums and quick-draw lyricism they eventually called The Roots.

Questlove talks the way he writes books and linernotes for Roots albums: vigorously expansive and colourfully digressive with lots of star names dropped in. He remembers Miles Davis walking into his high school one day and grabbing another student, organist Joey DeFrancesco, to go on tour. And a story about D'Angelo – Questlove co-produced the singer's 2000 smash, *Voodoo* – somehow leads to the drummer's "almost 20 minutes yesterday" on ➢

WE'RE NOT WORTHY

Chuck D on hip-hop's biggest cheerleader.

"Questlove's a Svengali, he's a curator, he is an incredible resource about hip-hop, ready to inform anyone on what it is and what it ain't. And he's making history each and every night along with the rest of The Roots on The Tonight Show. He's like our Quincy Jones: he calls, we move!"

Leon Bennett/Getty, Getty

the phone with Pete Townshend, mutually raving about mixtapes by the late producer J Dilla. The Who's guitarist is "a legit Dilla head," Questlove says, laughing, "almost past me."

Where does the name Questlove come from?

The Roots went through a bunch of phases. We started as Radioactivity – Tariq was T Metaphor, I was A Sample. That didn't last long. Tariq rechristened us Black To The Future – he was Hawk Smooth and I was Divine Technician. He named me that, and I didn't like it. The day that *De La Soul Is Dead* came out [in 1991], we said, "We're going to take this seriously." Tariq goes, "I'm Black Thought," and we changed our name to the Square Roots. He'd written down some other names for the group, and the last one was just a question mark. I took that. But when we did local press, everyone thought my name was Mark. Or "So, Brother Question…"

Now if you were old school, you were either a Rock, Ski or Love. I chose Questlove. LL Cool J reminded me, when we talked about both having "love" in our names, that he wanted to be J Ski but his grandmom said, "I can't let you do that." He said, "You know, 'ski.'" (*Puts a finger to the side of his nose*) I'm like, Wait, 'ski' is a reference to cocaine? I didn't know that.

When did you first become aware that your father was an R&B-vocal legend?

There were two moments when I realised my dad's a thing. We did a week in Toledo, Ohio and across the street from where we were performing at a nightclub, José Feliciano was doing a two-week stint at a Ramada Inn. When he walked in [to say hi] and started singing Long Lonely Nights, that was a big deal: how does he know my dad's song? And in David Ritz's [Marvin Gaye biography] Divided Soul, Marvin mentions in chapter one how much Lee Andrews' voice meant to him because of its proximity to Nat King Cole's velvet-y thing.

At first, you went on tour with your parents because it was cheaper than hiring a babysitter. How did you become your father's drummer and bandleader?

When I was 12, I got tricked into the family business. He started me at $250 a week which was way shy of the $600 he had to pay a regular drummer. And he knew I knew the show. But going on the road, man, I loved it. To be seven years old, three months after [the 1978 film] Kiss Meets The Phantom Of The Park comes out – I'm in a hotel watching Midnight Special, it's 1.30 in the morning, and I tell my sister I'm thirsty. I go out to the soda machine, the elevator doors open, and it's them! Gene Simmons was still in make-up. They came straight from the gig and were staying on the same floor.

I found out later that rock stars staying in finer hotels – that was an '80s thing. In the '70s, you stayed in the hotel closest to the airport or the stadium. My father was doing a month at this Sheraton in Buffalo, New York, and for a week straight I was pinball buddies with one of the guys in Kansas. There were also weird moments like Chuck Berry: Mr Berry, can I please have your autograph? "I ain't signin' no motherfuckin' autographs," slams the door in my face. My dad was like, "That motherfucker!"

Who were your first influences as a drummer?

I want to show you something (*turns on the TV*). This particular episode of Soul Train was important (*scrolls through a huge file of shows from the series*) because there was always this belief that the Average White Band had ghost players. There's no way in hell you can tell me these guys from Scotland are this funky. (*Plays AWB in 1976 doing Cut The Cake*). This was a Beatles-Sullivan moment for me, especially [English drummer] Steve Ferrone. I became a Ferrone junkie, studying everything he's done.

Cut to the day that The Roots became the Tonight Show band in 2014. I got a package an hour before we started taping. I opened it. It was Ferrone's snare drum from that Soul Train performance. He gave me that drum. To this day, I hold it holy. Ferrone was my god.

Do you have a particular style as a drummer? You play in different settings – live, the studio, on television – with so many different artists…

I know I have a trademark. There have been times when I hear a record: Oh, this drummer's dope. What is this? And someone goes, "You idiot, you don't know who that is?" There's at least 30 songs I've done for people that I totally forgot about. I stop in the studio, I drum for them and forgot about it.

But I'm a shapeshifter. If I'm playing with Sting, I'm instantly morphing into Stewart Copeland – all these nuances he's done on Police records. They are embedded in my brain. The first time we played with Sting [The Roots backed him at a 2010 Earth Day concert in Washington DC], he stops the song. He says, "I know what you're doing. This is not The Police. I want you to play like you play." But I've devoted my life to morphing into whatever drummer is needed for the moment. How can you not expect me to do the same, exact fills that Stewart Copeland plays on King Of Pain?

When you and Tariq busked on the street in Philadelphia, what was your repertoire?

We were doing four-hour sets on the corner without a plan. The rush was on Tariq to talk about this guy's green sweater or those sneakers, that light pole. He had that otherworldly ability to rhyme on the spot, where you hold nothing back. That's how fast his mind works.

Fast-forward seven months, we go into the studio. We never had a strategic meeting on what we would do when we get into a studio. In my mind, I'm going to make a regular rap album. I bring in all my records. My manager is like, "What are you doing with all these records? No, what you do on the street corner – do exactly what I saw." You want us to play

A LIFE IN PICTURES

Roots manoeuvres: Questlove down the years.

1 Afro-centric: a young Ahmir Thompson gets on the good foot in the late '70s.

2 Step into the realm: Questlove (far right) and Black Thought (front right) with The Roots in 2000.

3 "I like to think I'm the weirdest record collector ever": Questlove flicks through some of his 200,000 records, July 4, 2014.

4 Funky drummer: Questlove gets into the groove, Netherlands, April 2, 2003.

5 Gram slam: The Roots pick up their Grammy for Best Rap Performance with You Got Me, February 23, 2000.

6 Hanging with Pink Floyd's Nick Mason, New York, September 26, 2011.

7 Kiss off: Questlove with his mother Jacquelin in 2010.

8 Getting in a jam: The Roots and Jimmy Fallon perform Hello with Adele on The Tonight Show in 2015.

9 Questlove gets vocal in 2011 – "the more amateur-ish I sound [as a drummer], the better. I don't want to sound like Max Roach. I want to sound like the drums on God Save The Queen. I want to sound real, human."

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Elion Paz, Getty (5), Camera Press/Phil Knott, Courtesy Questlove

instruments? The first two days were a lot of kicking and screaming over what kind of band are we gonna be.

In the new book, you sum up The Roots' place in hip-hop music and culture with some frustration: "Hip-hop was like a party and we were invited late or not at all." And it's a repeated theme: The Roots were born out of your passion for hip-hop but never fully welcomed in it…

We were chosen by people reactionary to what was happening: "You guys aren't gangsta rap, and you play your own instruments, so I like you." Which is like being chosen in high school for your looks, but you know one day you're gonna age out. Nobody s aid, "We love The Roots because we love your music." It was, "I need something to grab on to, something that's anti-*that*."

Deep in my heart, I'm absolutely fine now that we were never allowed to play in the reindeer games. I'll be the first to admit that when I saw the Fugees on the cover of Rolling Stone [in 1996], I might have sat in the bathtub crying: we'll never get our cover. Now it's over 25 years later. The Fugees reunite at the 2023 Roots Picnic [the band's annual outdoor festival in Philadelphia]. And this person who talked me off that panic ledge [in '96] is like, "Do you still wish you'd travelled the path of the Fugees? Would you rather your second album sell 12 million units and it's downhill from there? Man, they're playing your festival." But even then, I was like, We can't even headline our own festival. (*Laughs*)

The Roots moved to London in the early '90s, touring Europe extensively before you had any profile in America. Why did you leave?

The Chronic was the greatest and most troublesome thing to happen to hip-hop. It showed you could have success being a credible artist. But then everybody goes, "Let's do exactly what Dre is doing." We didn't know how to do that. We needed a place that would embrace us.

What did you learn in exile? You actually got to London at the dawn of Blur and Oasis.

They didn't get the memo that the musician was obsolete. Every weekend, there was a jam session somewhere, and we would find ourselves there. And we learned what the festival was. You mean in Europe there's 700 of these? In my mind, there's Lollapalooza and Farm Aid and that's it. We got an agent and from early '94 until late '97, we spent six to seven months a year living in our apartment in London, doing monthly residencies in each country. People had the patience to see you before they rushed to judgement on whether you were disposable or not.

> **"We were chosen** by people reactionary to what was happening: **'You guys aren't gangsta rap.'"**

Did you feel any affirmation at the 2000 Grammy Awards when [1999's] *Things Fall Apart* was nominated for Best Rap Album and the single You Got Me [with Erykah Badu] won for Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group?

It's like the Mexican-standoff scene in Reservoir Dogs. Dr. Dre was up against himself – with Eminem and Snoop Dogg. We were also up against Puff Daddy with R Kelly and Janet Jackson with Busta Rhymes. The A-level squad ambushed each other and left us to walk on-stage. We were in the audience, sitting with all of the E Street [Band] wives and [actor] Chevy Chase. I'm like, We're not gonna win, we're not gonna win. Chase turns around: "Nice confidence." Then it's, "Ladies and gentlemen, The Roots." Everybody stood up and I was like, Huh?

But you were also becoming the king of yes: producing D'Angelo and Common; playing on sessions for Fiona Apple, Christina Aguilera and John Mayer; and backing Jay-Z in 2001 with The Roots on *MTV Unplugged*.

The genesis of saying yes was a moment in high school. There was a gas bill in the four digits. It was either my parents paid it or I continued my education in private school. To my parents, there was no choice, because the crack age had started, these things called drive-bys. My parents were like, "If we send you to public school, you will die." Maybe I internalised it: it's my fault we don't have any gas in the house. We're warming water on a hot pipe to take baths. We eventually got the gas back on, but I was like, Never again. So any gig that came…

When The Roots were on tour with the Beastie Boys [in 1995], Mike D used to wear these disguises and DJ at the soundboard before the show. I was like, I wanna do that. Then I realised I could make an extra 500 bucks DJing. And back then, $500 was survival money.

The difference between eating and not eating?

Yes, but mainly my obsessions were buying records and sneakers. ➢

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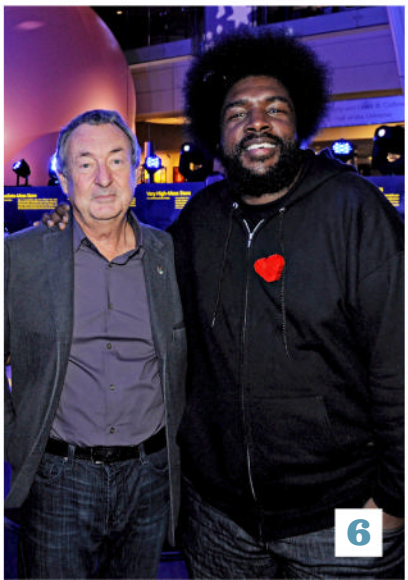
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Eugene Gologursky/Getty Images for Empire State Realty Trust

"**Sly Stone's story** is everybody's story. **What happens when you get everything** you want?"

How and when did you start collecting records?

I like to think I'm the weirdest record collector ever, the only music expert whose foundation was filler. Twice a week, since the age of three, I would go record-shopping with my dad. There was a spot called Sonny's. The first time we shopped there, it was a snowy day, and we walked four blocks so he could get Fire by the Ohio Players. He would buy 30 to 35 singles and do maybe $200 damage on LPs and take these records to rehearsal for his band to learn. Because it was five sets. Two of them were Lee Andrews And The Hearts shows, his material. The rest were dance sets, and you had to know the songs of the moment – Love Rollercoaster by the Ohio Players, Boz Scaggs' Lowdown.

The band would take the hits, to learn those songs, and I got what was left over: The Stylistics' Shame And Scandal In The Family [1977], Neil Sedaka's That's When The Music Takes Me [1972]. I was the king of flops. Whatever records weren't working, that's what I was listening to.

How many records do you have now?

It's 200,000 – with an asterisk. Initially, it was things like after Levi Stubbs of the Four Tops died [in 2008], his kids said, "Dad had 4,000 records, we don't have any space, do you want these?" Yeah. Down South, widows of guys who serviced jukeboxes would have a warehouse of 60,000 pieces. Mind you, in that room (*he points to a door at the other end of the apartment*), I might have 300 Billie Jeans I don't need. I felt like I was trapped – I'm not a waste dump.

Me, personally, digging – I stopped that four or five years ago. There's a guy I hired in 2006 – I think he works for seven of us [collectors]. If you're looking for that obscure J Dilla sample from a Gentle Giant record you've never heard of, he knows it's somewhere in Iowa or at a fire sale in South Dakota. What I do now, for the birthdays of kids of friends, I'll take them to Amoeba Records [in Los Angeles] and do the same binge shopping that me and my dad used to do.

Do you have time now to listen to music just for pleasure, away from the work?

Here's the deal. Since 1997, Soul Train has been my aquarium. That's a Prince term. When he was alive, whenever you'd go to Prince's house, two things were always on TV: [the 2003 animated film] Finding Nemo and Black Orpheus, this beautiful Brazilian film from 1959. He would have those on constant loop: "Yeah, it's my aquarium."

Since I've been at 30 Rock [the NBC studios at Rockefeller Plaza], I go there sometimes when I'm not working just so I can go into the master vault and watch the dress rehearsals and aired versions of Saturday Night Live, which are night and day from each other. It's like the gas that fuels my tank. It only feels like a job when they give you notes. (*Laughs*).

How would you characterise what The Roots do on The Tonight Show? You back up guest artists, play during commercial breaks and even participate in skits. But you also represent R&B and hip-hop nightly on mainstream American television.

Who are we? That's the million-dollar question. If I'm in an airport and someone goes, "Oh, my God, that's Jimmy Fallon's band," part of me feels that's like asking Michael Jordan, "Are you the guy from the Hanes underwear commercial?" I did a school symposium in 2002, and the first question one of the students asked was, "Do you know any real celebrities like André 3000 [of Outkast]?" After that, I gave up trying to figure out who we are. Being hard to describe has helped us – and hurt us. Being nice has helped us – and hurt us.

Being on television five nights a week has also affected the band's output. The Roots released 10 albums in the first 20 years. The

Empire state of mind: Questlove takes it higher, Empire State Building, New York City, 2024.

new album will be your first in a decade.

The first two weeks of Fallon [in 2009, for Late Night With Jimmy Fallon] – that was the hardest. It was like shooting a nude scene for a movie. As a band, we had never rehearsed. Shows were Springsteen-length, three hours, not to mention soundchecks. Now we're set up, facing each other in rehearsal [before taping], and I couldn't count it off, one, two, three. But once that ice melted, we were churning out song after song after song. Right now, in our database, just from between 2009 and 2020, there's probably 7,000 songs.

I see 30 Rock like we're in the gym every day. No matter how tedious it seems, I know that as a band we're gonna play together for at least an hour. As a result, as musicians, we got way better, like in my skill level as a drummer. It's weird to say that, because the more amateur-ish I sound, the better. I don't want to sound like Max Roach. I want to sound like the drums on [the Sex Pistols'] God Save The Queen. I want to sound real, human. And it's helped Tariq in his confidence. He knows more about projecting, the importance of a punch line.

When The Roots recorded [2013's] *Wise Up Ghost* with Elvis Costello, it was the first time you had worked so closely over a full album with a rock artist – as drummer, co-producer and even co-writer. What triggered that collaboration?

When we were on Late Night, we always talked about how we love Todd Rundgren and Elvis: "They come to the show all the time. Why don't we just work with them?" But nothing scares me more than to be the blemish on someone's storied career. I tried to put it off. But Elvis expressed genuine interest in what we were doing musically – and got it. It wasn't me trying to live up to *This Year's Model*. It became "Let's have fun with the unknown."

For me, the payoff was the endless stories – every question I ever had about 1977, first coming to America, the myth of the Saturday Night Live performance [when Costello switched songs on air, enraging producer Lorne Michaels]. It was a chance to nerd out on someone who I'd otherwise have to have five dinner dates with, like an interview with no magazine to put it in.

How far along were your plans to record with Amy Winehouse before her death in 2011?

She, Mos Def and me were going to redo the entire Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus, Max Roach album, [1963's] *Money Jungle*, writing new lyrics to the original [Ellington] songs. Jazz was a big part of my relationship with her. I don't know if she wanted me to know her jazz IQ was higher than mine, but it became this ongoing thing: "Bet you don't know about this record." (*Laughs*)

There was a point when she wasn't allowed to enter the States [for failing to pass a drug test], so she went to the [Caribbean] islands to do some songwriting. She Facetime-d me: "Can you get down here?" I said, I can't right now. I have this TV show. She couldn't get it. "When is it over? Can you get someone to replace you?"

She Facetime-d me one last time from London. I told her, Coincidence, I'm on my way there. The Roots had something to do in Switzerland; the second stop was London in three days. When I landed that morning, that's when I learned that she passed.

How far along are you with the Sly Stone documentary?

I have to turn in Sly in eight weeks. There was a point when we had a Cannes invitation, a press rollout, but that's long gone. For me, it's more important that the film gets executed in the proper way.

Do you feel you truly know Sly Stone – the legacy as well as the fall – because of this film?

Sly's story is everybody's story. He is the first black celebrity of the post-civil rights era. His success was different from Chuck Berry's or Ray Charles's, the acts that couldn't stay in the hotels or eat in the restaurants where they played. The question is: what happens when you get everything that you want? People all the time come to me with these conversations about, "Why can't so-and-so keep it together? Why does this guy always get arrested?"

It's a hard story to tell. I want to get rid of the troubled drug-addict genius. We never ask ourselves, "Why do we self-soothe on cocaine? Why is this person a sex addict? Why does this person get drunk a lot?" There's a lot to unpack there, especially for black artists. This is my hope [for the film], to plant the seed for that discussion.

What do you see, in the wake of telling Sly's story, as the future of hip-hop?

Hip-hop was the sound of people creating music in a time of trauma. Chuck D will tell you that [Public Enemy producers] the Bomb Squad wanted to sound like a crack high: "We wanted our music to reflect the panic and terror of the drug." I would say that Beyoncé is the last successful figure of an era of black singing that started in the church. Rihanna has a quality in her voice that I love, but she is not born and bred in that level of singing. And the further away we get from that, what is left? Listen to the last minute of James Brown's [1970 single] It's A New Day. There is pain in that screaming, all of the hardships he went through. It's as if I were to put a [hot] iron on my chest for 10 seconds.

People ask me, "How come I don't feel about music the way I did then?" We're a generation of numbness. Even the most successful rappers like Drake – he's one note. The emotion and passion in soul and funk – if that is our response to trauma, what happens when we get further and further from it? I don't know if that question can be answered yet, even though I've tried.

But it's a question worth asking.

You know what's weird? Because Tariq and I started out as buskers, freestyling on the corner, I'm used to that kind of rapid-fire level of figuring out what's next – which is you don't figure out what's next. You just do it.

Hip-hop Is History by Questlove and Ben Greenman is published by Auwa (in the US) and White Rabbit (in the UK) on June 11.

BEST QUEST

Three key albums in the Ahmir armoury, by **David Fricke**.

THINGS COME TOGETHER

The Roots

★★★★

Things Fall Apart

(MCA, 1999)

Hip-hop's greatest *band* crack the platinum ceiling in the US with a hooks-and-challenge ride in slippery time signatures (The Next Movement); skeletal-loop hypnosis (Step Into The Realm) and more. When it's down to rhythm and the flow of Black Thought and Common in Act Too (The Love Of My Life), it's like The Roots are busking on the street again. Then strings fly in and it's the other Sound of Philadelphia.

THE RHYTHM KILLER

D'Angelo

★★★★★

Voodoo

(VIRGIN, 2000)

Recorded in Hendrix's Electric Lady Studios – over four years of jamming and experiment, D'Angelo's second album is a masterpiece of slinky, erotic conjuring, driven by the singer's intense study of progressive-soul precedent (Sly Stone, Prince, Marvin Gaye). It's also a defining argument for Questlove's supportive genius: a drumming heartbeat and sonic *consigliere* so embedded in the music that he leaves no ego footprint, only the room for genius to rise.

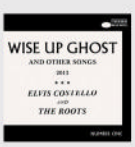
THE CAUSTIC COLLAB

Elvis Costello And The Roots

★★★★

Wise Up Ghost

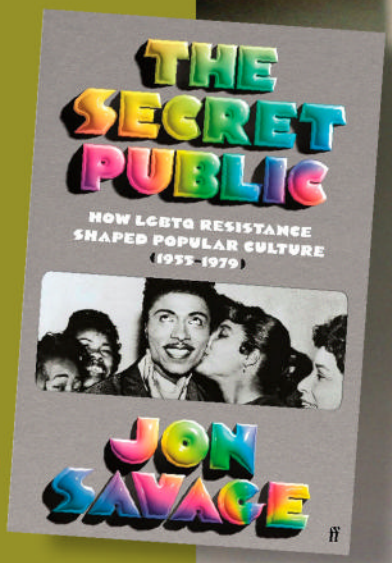
(BLUE NOTE, 2013)



The cover evokes the 1956 City Lights edition of Allen Ginsberg's Howl but Walk Us Uptown is right out of 1977: the shadows and broken reggae of Costello's Watching The Detectives fortified with The Roots' laid-back brawn. The singer is in top barbed-lyric form, his chant-like vocal spell under-scored by the claustrophobic punch of Questlove's garage-funk drumming. In fact, much of the album was recorded in The Roots' TV-studio dressing room.

NO STRANGER AM I

DUSTY SPRINGFIELD sang some of the 1960s' most luminous sides but struggled, like many, in an era that refused to accept or even acknowledge her sexuality. In a chapter from his new book about the profound influence of LGBTQ people on music and culture, from Little Richard to Sylvester, JON SAVAGE tracks her trials, and her triumphs. "I want to sing songs that are real," she said. "This is my hard fight."



David Magnus/Shutterstock

Credit in here

A star is born: Dusty Springfield prepares to perform her first hit, I Only Want To Be With You, 1963.

ON JUNE 16, 1967, DUSTY SPRINGFIELD'S thirteenth US single was reviewed in Billboard. Give Me Time was ranked among the records tipped for the Top 20 of the Hot 100 chart. The review, while short, nevertheless got to the heart of the problem: a big blowsy ballad with a full orchestra, Give Me Time was very much in the shadow of Springfield's huge, cathartic, summer 1966 hit You Don't Have To Say You Love Me, which went to Number 4 in the US and topped the UK charts. Despite the impeccable vocal, the treatment felt formulaic.

In the UK, Give Me Time was already stalling in the mid-20s by the middle of June. The comparative failure of the single marked a crisis for Britain's premier female artist. After a banner year in 1966 – four Top 20 hits in the UK, including three Top 10s and one Number 1 – Springfield was struggling to maintain her position in a fast-moving marketplace. Despite being voted Britain's top World Female Singer in the NME poll of 1967 and a well-received appearance at the NME Poll Winners Concert, her first single of 1967, I'll Try Anything, stalled outside the Top 10.

As the first of the new generation of British female singers, Springfield had benefited from the unitary nature of the British pop scene created by The Beatles, a broad church in which it seemed as though all kinds of records and attitudes could coexist in the Top 40. Springfield was a regular on the key weekly pop show Ready Steady Go!, where her friend Vicki Wickham was the editor. Dusty acted as a female compère and swapped barbs with The Beatles.

After autumn 1966, however, with the disappearance of The Beatles after their turbulent summer tour, this illusion of unity was no longer possible. In the first few months of 1967, the UK singles chart was temporarily dominated by what were called 'mums and dads' records: big ballads like Engelbert Humperdinck's Release Me. At the same time, the absence of The Beatles had coincided with the first beginnings of rock, a more aggressive, initially male form of music that espoused volume and countercultural values – which, in this period, meant psychedelics as the gateway to a new consciousness.

DUSTY SPRINGFIELD WAS CAUGHT IN THE middle. At 28, she was reaching the upper limit of the age range that, at the time, could automatically sell to teenagers. Since the middle of 1966, she had the accolade of her own BBC TV series – a sure sign of showbiz acceptance. Meanwhile, her image was changing. Since the first days of her solo career, it had always been heavily constructed, with piled-up beehive wigs and bottles of black eye make-up. "I overdid a lot of things," she later recalled. "It was a good thing to hide behind. Without the face I was a quivering wreck. I was terribly shy."

From the beginning, she had presented herself as a musician. The November 1963 Melody Maker cover that announced the success of I Only Want To Be With You – "Solo Star Born" – ran a cover photo of Springfield in the studio with a guitar. In another shot from the same time, she is shown tackling a drum kit in a nightclub. This was at a time when female musicians in pop groups were unusual. The Honeycombs would make great play of their drummer, Honey Lantree, almost as if she were a gimmick.

On her records, Springfield worked closely with her producer at Philips, the sympathetic Johnny Franz. He dealt largely with the musicians, while Springfield focused on the vocal arrangements. Her determination and perfectionism raised some hackles. "It wasn't easy to get those sounds onto 4-track," she told me. "I was breaking a lot of new ground and asking musicians to play things they had never heard before, because I had been to the States and they hadn't. So I scowled a lot. I got a reputation as a great scowler."

Throughout her early solo career, Springfield confounded expectations of what a female performer should be and do. She was extremely candid in her interviews: after a serious collapse in Tulsa during her first major US tour in October 1964, she described the feeling to Woman's Own: "Suddenly it's all too much. The walls start spinning. I can't go on any longer. It's being hungry and stopping in a roadside cafe to eat and having everyone staring at you. 'Click' go their eyes to your plate and then back to your mouth."

In all, Springfield's was a complex, fascinating public persona: a mixture of confidence and shyness, sharp wit and deep immersion in her singing. While her appearance was as solidly constructed as The Supremes' – in some ways, almost like a physical and psychic armour – her presence was constantly mobile, the fluttering of her hands giving away the tensions and the driving ambition beneath the surface. "I want to sing songs that are real, human, with deep emotional appeal," she told an American interviewer in 1964. "This is my hard fight."

At the core of Springfield's artistry was the sense of intimacy that she projected, and that reached its height on the flip of Give Me Time. Written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David, The Look Of Love had originally been recorded by Springfield for the soundtrack of the James Bond film spoof Casino Royale, but in April 1967 she re-recorded the song with a bossa nova feel that was as light as a feather. Riding this airy arrangement, her exquisite vocal sounded as though she were talking directly to you, and you alone. It was almost pillow talk.

She described the process to the singer Norma Tanega in terms of there being two currents in a song: the notes and the emotions. Her aim was to match the two. "She would always know when the emotion would drop off and that's when she'd stop and start again," Tanega recalled to Penny Valentine and Vicki

Spreading the Love: Dusty with Burt Bacharach, April 1970.

Getty (5), Shutterstock

Voice of the beehive: (clockwise from far left) classic of the era: *Dusty In Memphis* (1969); Springfield in 1965: "I was terribly shy"; at the 1966 Melody Maker Awards with Paul McCartney, Tom Jones and Ringo Starr; she bangs the drums: Dusty with Mike Hurst (left) and brother Tom Springfield as The Springfields on Ready Steady Go!, 1962; Springfield interviewed by press at London Airport in 1964 after being deported from South Africa for performing to an integrated audience.

Wickham. "The emotion and the tone had to mesh. People said that she didn't know her own ability, how good she was. She knew her ability all right, that's why it had to be perfect. She knew how to ride that river better than any other raft in the business."

Springfield's preternatural ability to transmit powerful feelings, like the abjection of Give Me Time and the intimacy of The Look Of Love, inevitably began to prompt the question of whom she was addressing. This question was exacerbated by the way in which her material appeared to reflect the melodrama of her life: it was as though her nakedly emotional songs involved the listener in her own soap opera – a quality which, along with her love of black American R&B and soul, helped to boost her popularity among gay men.

AFTER SPRINGFIELD'S ASCENT to national stardom in 1966, the rumours and innuendos about her gay fans and friends began. To insiders, it was an open secret. As part of the scene that swirled around Ready Steady Go!, Springfield was often in the Rediffusion Studios, socialising with Vicki Wickham, Cathy McGowan and gay co-presenter Michael Aldred. She was spotted around town with Peppi Borza, a Ready Steady Go! dancer who had had a record produced by Andrew Loog Oldham.

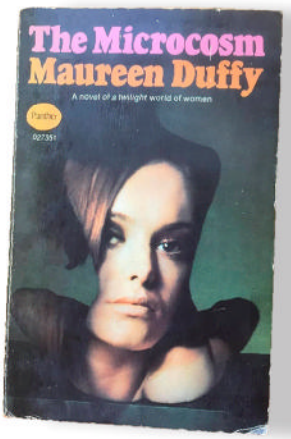
By this stage, Springfield was sharing a flat with the American soul singer Madeline Bell, triggering insider innuendos like the one that Melody Maker printed in their review of Give Me Time: "Yes, I can see this is an up-tempo teen-slanted platter that should be a wow on the chart. And also it's a fine record – bound to be a hit all over the world. And I like Madeline Bell too, Dusty."

Springfield's own appearances on the London gay scene included the occasional visit to the Sombrero – a basement gay bar in Kensington High Street – and she went to East End pubs with her friend Lee Everett, who was in the throes of splitting up with her husband Billy Fury. "Then there'd always be a drama on-stage or in the audience," Everett remembered. "She was adored by all those queens, you know."

Springfield also made regular visits to the Gateways, which was the principal lesbian club in London in the 1960s. Situated on the King's Road on the corner of Bremerton Street, the club had opened in the 1930s, before becoming popular among lesbians from the '40s onwards. It remained open to men, bisexuals, homosexuals and the curious until 1967, when owner Gina Cerrito introduced a women-only door policy. It was the one place where Springfield and other lesbians or bisexual women could be open, where they could be themselves.

"I overdid a lot of things. It was a good thing to hide behind. Without the face I was a quivering wreck."

DUSTY SPRINGFIELD



The soundtrack at the Gateways included most of Springfield's hits. Songs like You Don't Have To Say You Love Me chimed with the clientele, with yearning lyrics about loving against the odds or surviving rejection. Other popular tunes on the jukebox were the Everly Brothers' Walk Right Back and Walking Back To Happiness by Helen Shapiro. As another club-goer remembered: "The jukebox was always going. All the latest hits and lots of old classics as well. All the Tamla Motown stuff was at its height; The Ronettes and The Supremes were played over and over."

The writer Maureen Duffy's third novel opens with a description of the Gateways, which she called "the world turned back to front through a glass darkly." Published in March 1966, The Microcosm is a remarkable document, an avant-garde text set in the midst of a still subterranean sexual minority.

Duffy has a sharp eye for class and role. Many women who went to the Gateways dressed in a masculine style. The Butches, as they were called, aped heterosexual male dress, with leather jackets, boots, jeans and padded crotches. Duffy's characters include a Butch called Matt, referred to as "he" throughout; Cathy, a young woman who has left her working-class home to work on the buses; and an elder called Rae, who remembers the dropping of "the bomb" in 1945 as making nonsense "of any talk about ➢

Soul-powered: Dusty performing with Martha Reeves & The Vandellas on her RSG! Motown TV special, 1965; (below) Springfield's lover Julie Felix.

≺ human rights or which side was God's or humanity's".

The Microcosm caught a wave of greater lesbian awareness. In the UK, lesbianism was not illegal but was correspondingly overlooked as a social issue and a solid reality. By the mid-1960s, this began to change. The formation of the Minorities Research Group – and its associated activist magazine, Arena Three – drew national attention to the existence of lesbians as a distinct social and sexual minority.

IN JANUARY 1965, ITV's THIS WEEK attempted to answer the questions of 'What is lesbianism? What causes it… and can it be cured?' Presenter Bryan Magee found the women he interviewed – including the co-founder of Arena Three, Esme Langley – quite unwilling to accept his framing of their lives as a social problem.

A philosopher turned popular broadcaster, Magee stuck with the topic, writing an article in the New Statesman and collating data for the book he published in summer 1966, One In Twenty: A Study Of Homosexuality In Men And Women. With 21 chapters and three parts giving male and female homosexuality equal space, Magee's book became the standard text just as the law to partially decriminalise male homosexuality was going through its tortuous passage in the House of Commons.

Much of the material about male homosexuals was familiar, but Magee's chapters about lesbianism covered fresh ground for a wider readership. Unlike its male counterpart, he noticed that as far as society was concerned, lesbianism did not exist: "A very large number of people do not realise, even in adult life, that there is such a thing. There is not anything like the same discussion in public places – in fact it is scarcely discussed at all, and seldom mentioned in print."

Despite the bigoted language that surrounded the mooted change in the law, the topic of homosexuality was in the news and being discussed openly, in a way that it never had been before. On June 14, 1967, the BBC broadcast two programmes in which lesbianism was featured, one a round-table discussion, the other a focused documentary. In Consenting Adults 2: The Women, a number of lesbians were interviewed: an unhappy but candid butch called Steve Rogers, a distraught, anonymous housewife and Arena Three contributors Julie Switsur and Cynthia Reid – a happy and well-adjusted couple. The camera crew also shot in the Gateways with a number of regulars, who pointed out how relaxing it was not to be in a world dominated by men.

Yet Springfield was not in a position to benefit from this new assertiveness, locked in as she appeared to be to an old-school light-entertainment career. Nor was she prepared to be assertive: next to no gay man or lesbian was open about their sexuality during this period. She oscillated between candour and withdrawal, between bursts of confidence, crippling shyness and explosive outbursts.

According to her friend and sometime lover Julie Felix, the pressure was intense: "One time I went to Gateways with her, but I was terrified of being found out. We had to lie. I still feel the scars. I could never really be authentic."

> *"One time I went to Gateways with Dusty, but I was terrified of being found out. We had to lie. I still feel the scars."*
>
> JULIE FELIX

DURING THE REST of June and July 1967, Give Me Time floundered in both the British and US charts, peaking at Number 76 in the Billboard rundown on July 22. Three days later, Springfield held a recording session for a song called No Stranger Am I, a rapturous, almost spiritual folk song that celebrated the start of a love affair: "No stranger am I/You enter my world/I hear flowers sing/No emptiness now/You enter my world/Hear flowers with me/Sing joyous."

No Stranger Am I was written by her lover Norma Tanega. It had been included on the album that accompanied Tanega's spring 1966 hit Walkin' My Cat Named Dog, which had been produced by Bob Crewe in the then fashionable go-go style. While only reaching the 20s in the US and UK, Walkin' My Cat Named Dog attracted a quality of attention that went beyond its chart position. Tanega came from an activist folk background, and her breakthrough song seemed to herald a new kind of femininity: urban, hip, bohemian, unshackled by society's pressures.

When Tanega came over to the UK to promote the record in mid-summer 1966, she met Springfield while rehearsing at a taping of Ready Steady Go!. "I'm standing there with my guitar, like a dork," Tanega told Vicki Wickham and Penny Valentine, "while this woman, I had no idea who she was, stood on some scaffolding and went over and over this song until it was, of course, perfect." Once they began talking, Tanega was smitten: "She was witty and flirty, how could you not love her?"

After Tanega returned to New York, the two kept in touch regularly, until the American finally moved in with Springfield in Aubrey Walk, Kensington, where she met Dusty's brother Tom and her parents Gerard and Catherine O'Brien. "Dusty called me, and we met in New York," she told me, "and then I was playing guitar on No Stranger Am I. I lived with her right after that. I moved everything over, about two tons of stuff, and I expected to be there forever. The O'Brien family was my family."

Getty (3), Shutterstock

With Tanega's folky acoustic guitar and a crystalline, perfectly judged vocal, Springfield's version of Stranger is a moment of quiet snatched from the demands of everyday life. Dusty soars through the tricky changes with apparently effortless ease. A hymn to intimacy, it's one of the singer's greatest records of the 1960s, and one of the few recordings where she could directly and forcefully express something of a sexual and emotional life that was by necessity hidden.

CLEARLY, THE EXISTENCE OF LESBIANS WAS NOT something that the mainstream media or music industry could acknowledge in 1967, either in the UK or the US. The pressure on prominent lesbian and bisexual performers was intense, forced to come up with elisions and contortions to avoid telling a truth that they seemed to embody in their performances. If they sought and achieved emotional transparency on-stage, how did that make them feel when honesty was denied them in their real lives?

Springfield described that tension in a long September 1967 interview with her friend Penny Valentine of Disc, who found the singer "a complicated girl who doesn't really know where she is going. There's somehow an air of quicksilver about her that makes you think that tomorrow she may go 'pouff' and disappear from the scene. Sometimes you think she even believes it herself. So here's D Springfield in the middle of 1967. Over-generous to the people she likes. Surprisingly abrupt to those she doesn't. Easily hurt. Here she is then, at the crossroads."

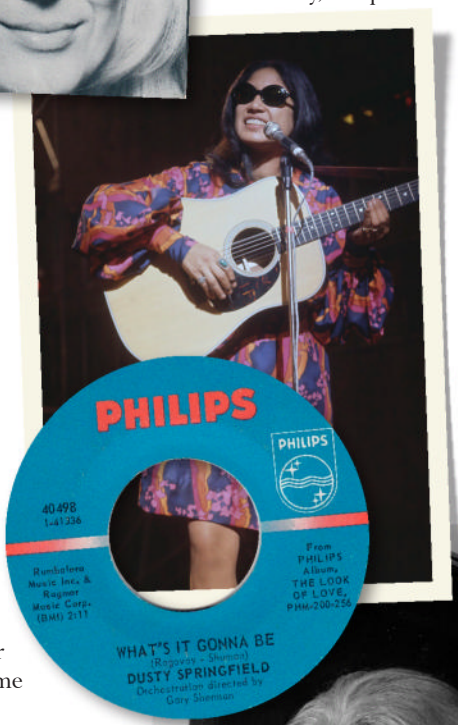
As ever, the question of marriage came up, and Springfield's answer was devastating: "You should love people anyway. But you have to exist with yourself first. I don't believe I can – that's why I can't see myself married."

The Valentine interview was supposed to preview Springfield's new single, her third of 1967 – an uptempo soul stomper called What's It Gonna Be. Released in late September, it went nowhere in the UK, her first major failure for a good while. While she was on tour in Australia during October, however, something unforeseen happened: The Look Of Love started slowly climbing the American charts and, by the end of the month, had breached the Top 30. In the first week of November, it peaked at Number 22.

That week, What's It Gonna Be was reviewed in Billboard. Ranked in Pop Spotlight: Top 60, along with new singles by Harpers Bizarre, Burt Bacharach, The Byrds, Clear Light and Country Joe And The Fish, the verdict on What's It Gonna Be was predicated on Springfield's success with The Look Of Love: "This pulsating change of pace rocker should catch up to the current hit in short order. She wails her way through this one, loaded with excitement and discotheque appeal."

Springfield was caught between her desire for freedom and the demands of the more conventional showbiz bag she found herself in: the light-entertainment shows, the hotel rooms, the cabaret spots. During November, she flew to California to tape various television programmes: The Joey Bishop Show, The Red Skelton Hour and The Dating Game. On all three she sang her current hit, The Look Of Love, and on The Dating Game she promoted What's It Gonna Be.

In order to sing this song on primetime TV, she had to undergo an exquisite humiliation. The format of The Dating Game was that the featured female would question three bachelors who were hidden from view; at the end, she would choose one to accompany her on a date, with expenses paid by the show. With her new curly wig and a halter dress, Springfield could barely hide her disinterest and disgust. If the whole rigmarole embodied the bind that trapped her, it was obvious from her face that this charade was not going to continue for much longer.



1968 WOULD PROVE A KEY YEAR IN SPRINGFIELD'S struggle to assert herself. In August, I Close My Eyes And Count To Ten rose to Number 4 in the UK singles chart, her biggest British hit in a while. It was also her last to be released in the US by Philips. The following month she flew to the States to start work with Jerry Wexler of her new US label, Atlantic, on what would become *Dusty In Memphis* – fraught sessions impeded by the singer's anxiety. "They were telling stories and talking about Aretha," she later said, "and I'm going, What am I doing on this label?"

The situation wasn't helped by the musicians' knowledge of her sexual orientation. "It was a kinda icky situation," remembered Bobby Woods, the pianist on the album sessions. "I didn't want to get too close to it. At that time people didn't dare come out of the closet. In the country where I came from, if someone found out someone was homosexual you either got hung or run out of town."

The first release from the Atlantic sessions came in early November, when Son Of A Preacher Man was issued in the US. A deeply soulful evocation of "the only one who could ever reach me", transformed by Springfield's sensual tones, this was the perfect relaunch and quickly entered the US Top 100, rising to Number 10 a couple of weeks into the new year.

On December 21, 1968, Son Of A Preacher Man reached the UK Top 20 – on the way to its eventual peak of Number 9. Although Springfield didn't know it, it would be the last Top 10 hit that she'd have in the UK for 21 years. On its eventual release in the US and the UK – during January and April '69 respectively – *Dusty In Memphis* got good reviews but no chart action. In time, it would be regarded, not just as Springfield's best album, but a classic of the era.

Meanwhile, the topic of her sexuality would remain private property until September 1970, when in an interview with the Evening Standard's Ray Connolly, she said, "I couldn't stand to be thought of as a big butch lady. But I know that I'm as perfectly capable of being swayed by a girl as by a boy. More and more people feel that way and I don't see why I shouldn't."

Clearly, the pressure of having to conceal who she really was had reached a critical point. In his account, Connolly gave her a chance to retract her admission, but she refused. "As we lived near each other I drove Dusty home after the interview, during which she mused jokily that what she'd just told me 'might put the final seal' on her doom. But she'd made her mind up. She wanted me to write it – although she couldn't quite bring herself to say that she was a lesbian."

Extracted from The Secret Public: How LGBTQ Resistance Shaped Popular Culture (1955-1979) by Jon Savage. Published by Faber & Faber on June 6.

Getting the look: Dusty in Blackpool, June 9, 1964; (above) Norma Tanega on RSG!, June 1966 – "how could you not love [Dusty]?"

LOVE & VIOLINS

Instrumental rock that touches the heavens and plumbs the abyss – such is the métier of the DIRTY THREE. Four decades on their unique path, juggling side-hustles with Nick Cave, Cat Power and more, the Aussie trio reconvene to pursue "the foreign and terrifying and unknown" with Coltrane and Stravinsky in their sights. "Admittedly, that's putting a big bar up," they grant VICTORIA SEGAL.

Photograph: BEN SEARCY

"THIS IS THE DAY IT ALL STOPS." IT'S A line that Warren Ellis often hears running through his head "like a mantra", but in an American hotel room 25 years ago, those words were ringing in his brain at alarming volume. Dirty Three, the instrumental trio the violinist formed with drummer Jim White and guitarist Mick Turner in Melbourne at the start of 1992, were on a short US tour.

"The shows were the first time I tried to get back on the stage after cleaning up," Ellis explains, "and the thought of being on-stage was so terrifying because I'd never been there not in some kind of altered state. I thought, OK, Warren. Listen to your body. Listen to what you need to do to get through this. And I instinctively just fell to my knees and started praying."

From his home in Paris, Ellis outlines his other pre-show superstitions: wearing certain rings, particular jewellery, the correct colour of sock. "If an instrument breaks," he says, "it feels catastrophic." Yet it is this ritual – "getting down on my hands and knees, connecting with the stage, praying" – that has become his touchstone. "The moment I step into the light, hopefully a shift will take place and I'm no longer the person that I was before I walked on. And if I am," he laughs, "I'm in trouble."

The act of transformation is right at the core of Dirty Three's remarkable mission. The omens were there from the start: as Ellis revealed in his visionary 2021 memoir, Nina Simone's Gum, he found his first musical instrument, an accordion, in a rubbish dump. The trio's first self-titled album was a rehearsal, recorded in Turner's bedroom (known to posterity as Scuzz Studio). "Everything got born out of playing live," says Turner, an approach that ➢

Ben Searcy

Into the light: the Dirty Three (from left) Jim White, Warren Ellis and Mick Turner whip up a storm on-stage, Fowler's Live, Adelaide, 2010.

Digging the dirt: (clockwise from left) Ellis, Turner and White, New York, 1996; Dirty Three (from left) Ellis, White and Turner take a ride, 2005; Ellis orders another bottle in the late '90s; the Three bring the noise at the Forum, Melbourne – "like looking at the ocean"; touchstone LP *Ascension*; new album *Love Changes Everything*; 2001 Low/Dirty Three collab EP In The Fishtank.

Bob Berg/Getty Images, Jim Newberry, Dirty Three_LiveViolin, Roger Viollet via Getty Images/Roger Viollet via Getty Images

➢ gives their records an alchemical charge. They might have emerged from the dank aftermath of Melbourne's post-punk scene, but their wordless music blasted wonder and awe, an old-school Romanticism committed – even then – to pushing the sky away.

Bill Callahan, who has been bringing White on board to drum with him since Smog's 2003 album *Supper*, witnessed Dirty Three's first American show in 1995. "There was a big buzz about them on the streets," he recalls, but that was nothing compared with the noise inside San Francisco's Great American Music Hall. "I felt like I was looking at and listening to the ocean," Callahan says. "Or a film of the ocean. Or I was a dolphin in that ocean."

Alan Sparhawk of Low, who toured with Dirty Three in 1997 and collaborated with them on 2001's superb In The Fishtank EP, describes watching the band in still-hushed tones. "I remember one particular show in Philadelphia being, like, I can't believe I'm in this room watching this happen," he says. "The light that you're reaching for when you're playing? They would touch it. Everybody else was just reaching, but there would be moments where they held the universe in their hands."

IT'S BEEN 12 YEARS SINCE DIRTY THREE'S LAST album, *Toward The Low Sun*. In fittingly expansive style, Ellis, Turner and White live across three continents – one obstacle to more regular collaboration. It's also not as if they're short of work. Ellis has been an increasingly vital part of Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds since he guested on 1994's *Let Love In*, as well as partnering Cave in film soundtrack work. In New York, White has just released his debut solo album *All Hits: Memories*, his charismatic, fluidly reactive style forging working bonds with Bill Callahan, P.J. Harvey, Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, Nina Nastasia and (with Turner) Cat Power. Operating out of Melbourne, meanwhile, Turner has released a string of impressionistic solo records and recorded two albums with his art-pop duo Mess Esque. That's far from everything.

This lack of dependence on each other means that when Dirty Three do regroup, it feels like a powerful choice. In 2019, while playing a handful of 25th anniversary shows for their self-titled debut album in Australia, they went into Melbourne's Headgap Studios to record for "four or five" days. The result is their beautiful ninth album, *Love Changes Everything*, its raptures and lulls layering past energies over new directions. The unbroken sweep of music is inspired by John Coltrane's 1966 album *Ascension* – one of those special records, says Ellis, that you have to "see through".

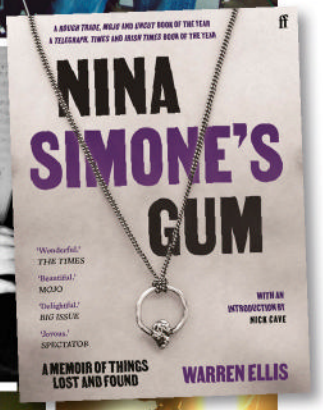
"It feels maybe in past recordings, you go into these studios and you can feel like you've got to play very carefully and get things right," says Turner. "But it was very improvised and it was very imperfect in many ways, and I think that's given it a really great energy."

"It's never felt dead or dying," says White. "I guess if it did, we wouldn't be here."

A few moments before White speaks to MOJO, an earthquake hits New York. "Ah, we're having aftershocks now," the drummer says as he strolls around his Brooklyn apartment with a cup of tea. "No, it's fine." When you've played in a band with Warren Ellis and Mick Turner for three decades, a bit of tectonic shifting is probably no big deal. White doesn't tend to be fazed by much, at least musically – maybe once, he says, when he was presented with some unexpected sheet music. "He's like Colombo," says Zak Sally, the former Low bassist and one of the rare people to have been invited to expand Dirty Three's ranks, touring with them in 2003. "Just always perfectly rumpled."

White was a teenager in Melbourne when he agreed to play the drums in a wholly theoretical school band. Yet the idea gradually

Curtain call: (clockwise from below) Dirty Three in the late-'90s; Ellis's 2021 memoir; key influence Russian composer Igor Stravinsky, 1929.



became reality, until he had a drum kit and found himself rushing home to practise every evening before going out to run about with the other kids, a mysterious drive he still doesn't quite understand.

As soon as he got a car, he was answering small ads for drummers, falling in with future Bad Seed Conway Savage. He was in a band called People With Chairs Up Their Noses when Turner – also known as Mick Sick of punk racketeers Sick Things – first met him in Melbourne around 1981. "Jim would have this ironing board with bits of junk that he would use as percussion," remembers the guitarist. "Their music was something else."

Turner, who had his head turned by Neil Young's Cowgirl In The Sand and the playing of PiL's Keith Levene, knew White was one of his people when he walked through Turner's front door, asked to borrow a Laughing Clowns record, and walked straight back out again: "He'd never been to my house before."

The pair became friends, and after Turner's two-year stint in the UK with Dave Graney's The Moodists they were reunited in precision-noise renegades Venom P. Stinger.

They met Ellis, who had been busking in Europe and working as a teacher in rural Victoria, a job that – if Turner's story about him going on a school trip in pyjamas is true – might not have been his vocation. The Melbourne music scene was in flux at the time. Some bands, remembers Ellis, "felt it was their duty to make it as impenetrable as possible. There was a band called Thug. They had a song called Fuck Your Dad."

> **"THE LIGHT THAT YOU'RE REACHING FOR WHEN YOU'RE PLAYING? DIRTY THREE WOULD TOUCH IT."**
> **ALAN SPARHAWK, LOW**

WITH THE CAVEAT THAT HE'S NOT A MUSIC historian, Warren Ellis outlines his theories about Australian alternative music of the '80s.

"I think what happened was Lou Reed came to Australia and did that tour where he did that shooting up on-stage routine [1974]. And I don't think the country was the same since. For me, somehow that seems to be the moment that got everybody off the beach and surfboards and long hair and gum trees," he laughs. "I could be totally wrong."

Ellis himself was playing in a phalanx of different bands – enough to "pay my rent, take drugs and drink and have the odd doughnut here and there. As long as I could keep my violin bow rehaired – luckily I had a guy who would give me credit. We would get shows in one of the bands I was in and then I could stop working in kitchens and I could stop selling drugs and I was just able to make music."

When a friend of Ellis's asked him to put together a band to play instrumental music in his hotel, he called on White and Turner. "We were old at the time – I was 26 and that was old then to be starting a band. Mick was 30. Jim was almost 30. But we were also surrounded by bands who'd been over in Europe and then come back, people like David McComb [The Triffids] and Kim Salmon [The Scientists], and they were sort of launching new careers, so there was also that bunch of people around." The influence of Nirvana was also pervasive. "It was an interesting period of time."

A residency at a "fucking horrible bourgeois jazz club" came to an end after one night because "we weren't jazz." They "certainly weren't classical," either, says Ellis. Audience confusion about what Dirty Three actually were could curdle into something sourer.

"We could play a bar, there'd be four people there, and five of them wanted to beat my head in," Ellis explains delightedly. "Someone said the thing he loved about our shows was that you could be standing next to two people and the person on the right would be in tears and the person on the left would be saying 'this just sounds like cat's piss.'"

"We'd definitely polarise people, but there was a lot of love for the band and excitement about it," White counters. "It was in the early days of Warren attaching the pickup to his violin, which could be very wild."

There was a restlessness to go with that wildness – a desire, says White, for a "great adventure". They sent out a tape and eventually, says Turner, "this tiny label called Poon Village asked us to come over to America."

"In retrospect, that was an important thing for us," says Ellis. "If you made it in Australia, you seemed doomed to not go anywhere in the rest of the world. And you know, we were never aiming for chart success, clearly. It was more about making the music that we wanted to make and just having a great time. It's the greatest thing to be touring around, sleeping in a bed with Jim White, with $5. It's the golden era."

ELLIS HAS JUST RETURNED FROM BRUSSELS, WHERE he attended the opening of The Devil – A Life, Nick Cave's exhibition of his ceramic sculptures. "It's so absolutely wonderful to see him jumping into a place where he wouldn't be as sure-footed as when he is trying to write a song," says Ellis. "And I find that incredibly inspiring, that people will take the risk."

He felt that excitement with his book, he says, and when he opened Ellis Park, his animal sanctuary in Sumatra. "I had no idea what that involved but my heart told me that it was the right thing to do. Logistically, if I'd sat down and had it explained to me, it probably would have put me off."

He's also drawn to that element of risk in the music he loves. "People like Alice Coltrane, John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy and Miles Davis and Stravinsky. These people." He keeps adding more. "Charles Mingus, Nina Simone, people who… Beethoven! I love the energy of rock'n'roll and I love AC/DC, but what I really appreciated as a listener were people who put themselves outside ➢

Three's crowd: (clockwise from left) Ellis with Marianne Faithfull; Turner and White (front and right) in Venom P. Stinger; Warren and Nick Cave at the Lawless premiere, 2012; The Blackeyed Susans (clockwise from top left) Ellis, Phil Kakulas, Rob Snarski, David McComb, White and Graham Lee, 1993; White (left) and George Xylouris.

DIRTY WORK

The ubiquitous Warren Ellis, Jim White and Mick Turner branch out, 1988-2024. By VICTORIA SEGAL

VENOM P. STINGER
WALKING ABOUT

(single, Aberrant, 1988)

Mick Turner and Jim White were both members of this Melbourne noise band, fronted by former Sick Thing Dugald Mackenzie. A paranoid panic attack, Walking About is all red flags and Black Flag, a toxin-fuelled post-hardcore thrill.

CAT POWER
METAL HEART

(from Moon Pix, Matador, 1998)

Deep in an existential crisis, Chan Marshall faxed Turner and White to request their presence on her fourth album. Her instincts, as ever, were good: they were perfect conduits for these haunted, clairvoyant songs. "Metal Heart really kills me," said White in 2021.

MICK TURNER
MOTH 3

(from Moth, Drag City, 2002)

Turner is also a visual artist and his smudged, ecstatic dreamscapes – horses, angels, mermaids – can be seen on Dirty Three's album sleeves. Guitar and paintbrush merge on this light-and-shade instrumental from his third solo album.

NICK CAVE AND WARREN ELLIS
SONG FOR BOB

(from The Assassination Of Jesse James By The Coward Robert Ford, Mute, 2007)

Taken from Ellis and Cave's second soundtrack project, after 2005's *The Proposition*, this track from Andrew Dominik's western comes with a masterful big-sky, big-picture sweep. Their other soundtrack work includes The Road (2009), Dahmer – Monster (2022) and this year's Back To Black.

GRINDERMAN
NO PUSSY BLUES

(from Grinderman, Mute, 2007)

Seconded into the midlife-crisis wing of the Bad Seeds, Ellis picked up electric guitar and got back to the basement for this purging of rock'n'roll impulses. It's the record that Cave's then-moustache would have wanted him to make.

COURTNEY BARNETT AND KURT VILE
LET IT GO

(from Lotta Sea Lice, Matador, 2016)

Turner and White – who have also played together as splinter group The Tren Brothers – provided their services on this woozily jetlagged track from Barnett and Vile's charming Melbourne-Philadelphia collaboration. "One of my favourite bands," says Barnett about Dirty Three; she also owns a Mick Turner painting.

XYLOURIS WHITE
DAPHNE

(from Mother, Bella Union, 2019)

White and Cretan laouto player George Xylouris have released five albums, all produced by Fugazi's Guy Picciotto. This heat-stroked incantation exemplifies their ability to dig into ancient soil and find music for the moment. Don't miss the brilliant video featuring their mothers dancing.

MARIANNE FAITHFULL
LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

(from She Walks In Beauty, BMG, 2021)

Having worked with Marianne Faithfull on 2018's *Negative Capability*, Ellis reunited with the grandest of dames for a collection of romantic poetry readings. As Faithfull narrates Keats's gothic *femme fatale*, Ellis (helped by Brian Eno and Nick Cave) ensures the background atmospherics loiter palely.

BILL CALLAHAN
COYOTES

(from YTILAER, Drag City, 2022)

Hard to think of a better drummer for Bill Callahan's cosmic phase than White: sensitive, responsive, able to open up a little portal where needed. He's behind this mystical love song as Callahan sings of "holding hands through many lives." Keeping a different kind of time.

JIM WHITE
MARKETPLACE

(from All Hits: Memories, Drag City, 2024)

Designed to capture the scene at Melbourne's Victoria Market, this synth-augmented track from White's solo debut feels like a whole sympathetic nervous system crunched into two minutes of fight-or-flight action. Far from Dirty Three's slow-building grandeur, but the energy is all there.

What they do in the shadows: (clockwise from below) Dirty Three live in 2016; Ellis takes a bow in 2005; 1996's *Horse Stories* album.

"WE COULD PLAY A BAR, THERE'D BE FOUR PEOPLE THERE, AND FIVE OF THEM WANTED TO BEAT MY HEAD IN."
WARREN ELLIS

of their comfort zone. When we were doing stuff like I Offered It Up To The Stars & The Night Sky [from 2000's *Whatever You Love, You Are*] or Authentic Celestial Music [from 1998's *Ocean Songs*], I wanted it to be like The Rite Of Spring. Admittedly, that was putting a big bar up, but I wanted to feel like I was at least attempting to jump into that pond. It's not the skill, it's the intent. The stuff that seems foreign and terrifying and unknown is the stuff that emotionally I'm attracted to."

In many ways, the risk they took heading to America paid off. Armed with the ragged glories of 1994's self-titled LP and 1995's *Sad & Dangerous*, they opened for the post-Nirvana generation of indie bands: Beck, Pavement, Beastie Boys, Sonic Youth. The transition to bigger venues didn't tame their stage presence, though – even if they were pelted with dog biscuits by Beck fans. Turner fondly recalls "one amazing night" in Houston. "Warren used to spit quite a bit, disgustingly. He spat on the ceiling and it started coming down, and it seemed like all 8,000 people were chanting, 'Woahhhhh! Fall on his head!' as this line of saliva was swinging."

"As I looked up, it just fell on my face," explains Ellis. "That was the biggest cheer we got for the whole show. And the look on Jim White's face. My God, it was awesome. It's so great to look at Jim White." He laughs. "Jim would always have that kind of look an uncle gives you when you've done the right thing by making a mess at the family Christmas dinner and you've kind of disgraced yourself. Jim gives you a look like, 'Good on you, kid.'"

ZAK SALLY, FONDLY RECALLING THEIR 1997 TOUR with Low, takes a 'here's another one' approach to anecdotes about Dirty Three. He remembers the last night of the tour, when Turner and White took over the lighting for Low, adding disco lights to the most un-disco of bands. In Philadelphia, Dirty Three finished their set and a bottle of Maker's Mark and decided to keep playing until they emptied the venue. "Warren would just start playing a Sabbath song. I'm sure they tried some Deep Purple." Sally was sitting with his back to White's kick drum to stop it flying off-stage. "You've seen Jim drum, he's all over the place. So I'm afraid he is going to take my eye out with a mallet. Warren is doing high kicks and I'm like, This is the greatest show I've ever seen, and Warren is going to break my jaw."

Yet playing over 150 shows a year was starting to take a toll. "I don't even remember going into a laundry for six fucking years," laughs Ellis. By the time they came to record *Horse Stories* in London in 1996, things were fraught. "It was at the end of touring. I wasn't in showroom condition," recalls Ellis. "I remember it got to a point where Mick was going to catch a boat to Amsterdam. Jim was ready to thump me and I was kind of comatose in the corner. We didn't even have anyone to record us because the engineer fucking double-booked us with another band in London but hadn't told anybody. We were just sitting there."

"I remember thinking, I've got to get out of this space," says Turner. "I walked out the studio door, and there just happened to be a train station opposite. I just walked into the station and onto a train. I didn't know where it was going. It gave me a bit of space to think. I don't think I can really talk about it, but yeah, sometimes it's hard to work with people who aren't sober."

Horse Stories would become a breakthrough record, but Ellis remembers they nearly buried it. "We didn't want to put it out, that's my memory of it. We decided we fucked it up."

There would be an intervention: Ellis had sent a tape to Nick Cave. "It was when he was with Polly [Harvey] and they were just like, 'You've got to put this record out. We've been listening to it. It's great.' We went back in and mixed it after that."

THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER BUMPS IN THEIR ROAD – having 1998's *Ocean Songs* rejected by their UK label before Bella Union picked them up; a period of creative block before *Toward The Low Sun* took shape – but the gravitational pull between them has never wavered. More than three decades since they assembled in Ellis's St Kilda kitchen, *Love Changes Everything* is Dirty Three gloriously resurgent. This isn't the day it all stops.

"When we do get back together, it just feels like it's the day after we made *Ocean Songs*," says Turner. "It just feels like we've always been friends."

"Obviously I'm very close with the people," says White, "but also we all love the band."

"We see each other getting older and stuff, but when we get back together and play, it just doesn't matter," says Ellis. "It just makes it even more beautiful. I'm really happy that the three of us collided in 1991 and we're still picking up the pieces."

Kevork Djansezian/Getty Images For Bad Seed Ltd, Anna Faragona, Sarah King, Barney Britton/Getty, Prudence Upton, Bleddyn Butcher

You want it darker: "Shit's been really bad but I think we're going to be OK," says Jessica Pratt.

MOJO PRESENTS

Seeking "classic song structure through a weird foggy filter," JESSICA PRATT explores the Stygian corners of her mind amid a deep, hypnotic hush. One question: are you ready for the singer-songwriter who finds Leonard Cohen upbeat? "There are definitely no happy endings," she tells TED KESSLER.

Photography by NINA GOFUR

THERE'S A QUOTE BY LEONARD COHEN ON THE INNER SLEEVE OF *HERE IN THE Pitch*, the spectral new album by the Californian singer-songwriter Jessica Pratt: "The fact is that you feel like singing, and this is the song that you know."

In a mid-'70s interview, Cohen had been asked about his reasons for writing. After a ramble around the possible explanations ("to keep busy, avoid the pool room"), he landed on this: he just wanted to sing a new song of his own.

This seemingly simple idea resonated deeply with Pratt, partly because people are always asking *her* what her songs are about, and what drives her creativity. On a promotional tour of European cities, in the past week she's been probed in Paris, Berlin and Amsterdam on the other-worldly ambience of her music, what gives it its timeless feel. In such circumstances, she says now, sitting in an east London café, the Leonard Cohen quote offers reassurance.

"You don't really think of Leonard Cohen as being a reassuring guy, but it feels profound too," the 37-year-old ex-Amoeba Music employee explains in her crisp, measured speaking voice. "Whatever you produce or write can only be made by you. You're only really capable of making music with your own specific spiritual imprint, with your essential qualities."

Pratt's own essential qualities are easy for her to identify: "Subtle sounds, subtle dynamics, hopefully strong melody." And at the heart of it all, a creeping sense of resignation, wonder, dread. "I think the passing of time is an ingredient in all my songwriting."

She swirls her coffee cup, and we agree to explore this further. ➢

Nina Gofur

"I think the passing of time is an ingredient in all my songwriting": Pratt on-stage with Cyrus Gengras at Mono, Glasgow, April 6, 2015; (right, from top) 2012's eponymous debut album; *On Your Own Love Again* (2015); Jessica's new LP.

"I SPEND A LOT OF TIME BATTLING MY OWN MIND. MAYBE THIS CONTRIBUTES TO HOW LONG IT TAKES ME TO RECORD."

Jessica Pratt

THE ENGINE ROOM CAFÉ WAS CHOSEN FOR MOJO's rendezvous with Pratt as it sits in the midst of the Walthamstow Wetlands, a nature reserve set amongst the reservoirs that supply London's taps and toilets. In theory, it's dead on a wet and windy morning.

In practice, every table but ours is filled with parents and marauding toddlers, their cries echoing around the high, exposed brickwork. But rising from the sound system above the tantrums and scraping of chairs is the joyous fatalism of Karen Dalton's 1971 calling card, Something On Your Mind. It feels spookily significant. Like Dalton, Pratt too is a songwriter with a uniquely characterful singing voice, often misdiagnosed as a folk artist due to her mostly acoustic backing, but whose music reverberates just as much with the influence of tropicália and '60s pop, as well as a kind of overriding ethereal innovation.

Pratt nods appreciatively. "They've got a good playlist going on here," she decides, a tattoo of a thick cross peeking out from under one cuff of her vintage shirt and velvety coat. "Karen Dalton… They've had some Leonard Cohen too, some Joni Mitchell…"

Both Cohen and Mitchell were touchstones in the Pratt household when Jessica was growing up in Redding, a small city in Northern California. "It's a place with a lot of megachurches and methamphetamine RVs on the side of the road," she explains, "but also kinda scenic, with some nicer parts of town."

Those parts were less known to her, however. "I grew up pretty poor," she says. "Single mom on welfare, food stamps, no money. It could be distressing, but within that, while we were poor, we were basically happy."

Her mother was a music nut who helped introduce Jessica not just to historic folk and rock, but also to contemporary sounds. "She read all the music magazines and took maximum advantage of Napster in its prime. We had a fully-fledged music library due to her studiousness with that."

Teaching herself guitar at 15 by playing along to T.Rex's *Electric Warrior* on her elder brother's Stratocaster, Pratt soon moved on to a nylon-stringed acoustic she picked up with 40 of her mother's dollars in a local church thrift store, where she also found the threads to enable a make-over as her "life-long fashion icon, Brian Jones". Eventually she started writing her own songs, with no ambition beyond seeing if that was something she could do. She still favours a nylon-string classical or Spanish guitar, its soft-plucked sounds helping define her music's deep hush.

By 18, she'd moved to San Francisco in search of brighter lights, finding counter work initially in a bakery, later in record stores: "I lived in Nob Hill, filled with old bars, which, coming from Redding, was magical." There, a friend heard her playing and encouraged Pratt to record some demos in the home-built studio of a mutual acquaintance, which through a series of coincidences found themselves in the hands of multi-band local hero Tim Presley (Darker My Love; White Fence). Presley was so taken with Pratt's space-folk melodies, tunes that seemed beamed in from another era, that he started a label, Birth Records, to release her eponymous debut LP in 2012.

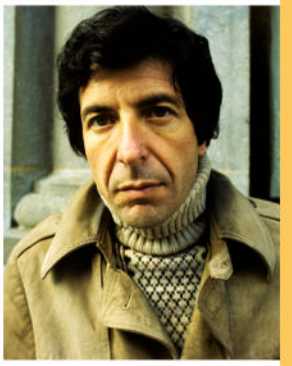
Despite positive word-of-mouth, Pratt still had no real designs on a musical career, but that year a personally defining moment underlined time's keen necessity: her mother died of lung cancer.

"It was a big transitional period," she says. "Prior to that, life had been predictable. Same friends and job for so long, but my mother got sick somewhat suddenly, then died, and my relationship which I had since I was a teenager ended after seven years. I became unmoored."

When friends said they were moving to Los Angeles, she followed. Alone and grieving in a vast new city, Pratt started recording new songs in her tiny bedroom on a Tascam 4-track. These mysterious, melancholic compositions coalesced "fairly quickly, for my general speed" into a new album. *On Your Own Love Again* came out on Drag City in 2015 and seemed to have been processed with a sepia wash, as if a nugget from a bygone age to be filed alongside Vashti Bunyan and Nick Drake.

Samuel Hess, Getty (3), Jonas Holthaus/laif/Camera Press

Pitch perfect: (clockwise from left) Pratt in 2018; suited and booted in 2024; key influence Leonard Cohen, 1972; Patrick Flegel, Jessica's "favourite guitarist by far".



"That's the music I like," she agrees. "Classic song structure through a weird foggy filter. I was not grounded making that record, though. It sounds kind of gaseous to me, ambiguous. I guess 'ethereal' is the word, but not necessarily in a positive way."

Five-star reviews, world tours and a chase for her signature ensued, but while her career was now launched in earnest, Jessica Pratt often feels a semi-reluctant bystander to it. There's always something on her mind.

PRATT'S MOST RECENT ALBUMS, 2019's *Quiet Signs* and the current *Here In The Pitch*, were written at the home in LA's Elysian Park she shares with her romantic and musical foil Matt McDermott, and then recorded bit-by-bit at her label Mexican Summer's Brooklyn studio, Gary's Electric. Moving into a proper studio to record and allowing other instrumentation to seep in has enabled Pratt's sound to expand, while remaining essentially sparse and direct. In many ways, both albums are mirrors of each other: widescreen, quietly dramatic, influenced to their Californian core by Brian Wilson, 1966-70. The space Pratt leaves within her music is ultimately a demonstration of the confidence in her melodies – not that she'd be so grandiose to say so herself.

The process, however, is neither enjoyable nor easy for her. Editing is long and ruthless: more than twice the final 30 minutes is left on the floor. "My main driving forces creatively are pure, unexamined creative instinct, a talent for synthesizing certain things," she reckons, "and then being hugely self-critical, thinking everything is trash. It's these two sides warring with each other."

PRATT'S Entertainment

The albums on rotation while *Here In The Pitch* took shape.

CINDY LEE
What's Tonight To Eternity
(W.25th, 2020)

The fifth album by Canadian Patrick Flegel's drag alter-ego. "A spectral siren in a fur coat singing timeless, lonesome melodies through the gloom," explains Pratt. "My favourite guitarist by far. There's nobody else making music like this. Truly underground."

WENDY & BONNIE
Genesis
(Skye, 1969)

Bay Area sisters who made this one groovy album and then vanished. "The texture and tone of their voices bewitches me," writes Pratt. "They were incredibly young when they made this album. The songs feel so sophisticated but still pleasingly naive."

GUIDED BY VOICES
Propeller
(Rockathon, 1992)

Fifth album by Robert Pollard's *bric-a-brac* band. "It feels hyper-nostalgic even on a first listen. Impressively varied like their classic albums to follow. Headbanging rock, at times punky and rough, murky and catchy acoustic jammers, all obscurely poignant."

STEVE KUHN
Steve Kuhn
(Buddah, 1971)

Rare mid-period vocal excursion from the jazz pianist. "Incredible production, hot jazz players at the top of their game, but satisfyingly loose," writes Pratt. "Dusky strings. Kuhn's voice is honest and rich but plain in a way that feels like the late-night confessions of your taciturn friend."

This is not the only reason for the five-year gap between albums, however. "At the start of this cycle, 2020, I was having a really hard time mentally," she explains. "I was not in a good place, struggling with… things."

'The Pitch' in *Here In The Pitch*, refers to pitch darkness – an expression of Pratt's frame of mind when she wrote the songs. It closes with a Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head-like lullaby called The Last Year which cracks the door on Pratt's wellbeing, as she sings "Out of luck, and out of time/It's true the last year ought've plagued my mind." It is, she explains, "one of my most straight-forwardly earnest songs."

"Over the last 10 years I have certainly struggled with my mental health," she says. "I spend a lot of time battling my own mind. Maybe this contributes to how long it takes me to record. I have to clear the mental path just to get things done."

The Last Year is a hand extended to Matt McDermott in recognition and thanks in this regard. "My husband and I have been together seven and a half years, throughout this. And yeah…"

She casts her eyes around the café.

"The song feels like, Shit's been really bad but I think we're going to be OK. There's a silver lining, you know? It's a complicated feeling. I'm still fucked up, shit is still fucked up, but we love each other and we're going to keep trying to make sense of all this."

Life, suggests MOJO, is not always straightforward.

"Well, there are definitely no happy endings," she agrees with a shrug and the slimmest of smiles, aware perhaps that we have nevertheless reached our own.

Double identity: Pete Townshend tools up for his solo career, December 1981.

CRASHING BY DESIGN

ADDICTION, ALIENATION, OBSOLESCENCE – IN THE '80s, PETE TOWNSHEND WAS FIGHTING ON MULTIPLE FRONTS. AS KEY SOLO WORKS ARE RE-RELEASED HE REFLECTS ON A DECADE OF CRISIS, AND AN INTRIGUINGLY UNRESOLVED FUTURE, IN WHICH ROGER DALTREY MAY STILL PLAY A PART. "THE WHO ARE NOT DONE YET," HE WARNS MARK BLAKE.

PORTRAIT BY CHALKIE DAVIES

Chalkie Davies/Getty Images

LAST SUMMER, PETE TOWNSHEND FOUND HIMSELF in an unlikely situation, even by The Who's unlikely standards. The one-time *enfant terrible* of '60s pop, who'd famously hoped for death before obsolescence, was 78 and about to plant a tree on the King's private estate.

The Who had just performed at Sandringham Park, and Townshend and vocalist Roger Daltrey were honouring its eco-friendly mission statement by planting a sapling each. Townshend had a Tilia Cordata Winter Orange and Daltrey a Laurel Oak, plus a spade to lean on while a photographer took pictures.

"I said to Rog, You know we've been set up here, don't you?" recalls Townshend. "I said, This is the moment when you plant a tree and your soul goes in with it. Then they'll put up a plaque that reads, 'Herein lie the souls of Pete Townshend and Roger Daltrey.'"

Almost a year on, Townshend squints into the sun on a blustery spring afternoon. "But The Who are not done yet," he grins. "I don't want to do what I did before, and say we're never going to work again."

The 'before' in question was 1982, when The Who played their supposed farewell tour and Townshend released his third (and favourite) solo LP, *All The Best Cowboys Have Chinese Eyes*. That album and its successor, 1985's *White City*, have just been reissued, inviting Townshend to re-evaluate both and the tumultuous circumstances in which they were made.

The Who's '70s had seen them on a creative and commercial hot streak, beginning with their US breakthrough, *Tommy*, and continuing through the grand, filmic *Who's Next* and *Quadrophenia*. But Townshend always considered solo ventures, such as his 1972 debut *Who Came First*, as a fun antidote to the day job. Then The Who lost drummer Keith Moon in September '78 and everything changed.

The group continued for a time, but Townshend signed a solo deal and threw himself into the new decade by making music without The Who, planning his equivalent to Prince's Purple Rain movie, writing books, and navigating The Who's eventual demise and his personal demons.

"It was a journey into darkness," he says, today. "If that doesn't sound too dramatic. You know, I'm *still* learning how to be in a band," he adds, with the resigned air of someone who knows he'll never pass the exam. ➢

"IT WAS A JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS. IF THAT DOESN'T SOUND TOO DRAMATIC."

Who came first: Townshend enjoys DH Lawrence at his aunt's bric-a-brac shop, north London, October 8, 1966; (right, clockwise) The Who, 1981 (from left) Townshend, Kenney Jones, Roger Daltrey, John Entwistle; Pete in action at Leicester Granby Halls, April 13, 1967; reading his 1985 book Horse's Neck; with Joe Strummer before the Who/Clash Shea Stadium gig, October 13, 1982.

What condition were The Who in when this chapter begins?

The Who were in a state of ferment and I was struggling to write a better album for them than *Quadrophenia*. The individuals were changing. The band were doing good gigs with Keith Moon's replacement Kenney Jones. But Roger wasn't happy with Kenney's playing and he wasn't happy having 'Rabbit' [John 'Rabbit' Bundrick], our keyboard player, in the band. I'm still not quite sure who Roger felt was going to come out of the woodwork to replace Keith. John Entwistle was also getting problematic – louder and louder, like an harmonic onslaught.

Is this what made you consider a solo career?

I could see the writing on the wall, but I also got these approaches from labels like CBS and Atlantic [in 1979]. I was flattered by Walter Yetnikoff, the head of CBS, offering me a million dollars, and Atlantic's Ahmet Ertegun wanting me on his legendary label. So I bowed to outside pressure, but I didn't think it through.

In what way?

I signed a solo deal with [Atlantic imprint] Atco and then a new deal for The Who, thinking that all I'd have to do was write songs. I didn't realise that every album, including the solo ones, require support, and that as The Who's major songwriter, I'd signed contracts that meant I had to deliver one, two, three, four… *eight* albums over five years.

You once said "my first drug of choice is overwork", though.

It was fun – I want to make that clear – but when I wasn't touring with The Who and writing songs, I was trying to bring up my family. So the gap between Who albums started getting longer and longer until fans began to complain – "When's the next Who album, Pete? Good, bad or indifferent, we want a new Who album."

Did you feel inspired or threatened by the new music around at the time?

The punk movement was building when we were making [1978's] *Who Are You*, and I felt threatened until I realised the musicians were Who fans and wanted to go for a beer with me. My friendships were with people in the punk and post-punk world, particularly The Clash, and later the new romantic crowd. We did two shows at Shea Stadium with The Clash supporting [in October 1982], and they were better than us – more alive.

The Who's first album without Keith Moon, 1981's *Face Dances*, was a UK and US Top 10 hit. But so too was your second solo LP, 1980's *Empty Glass*.

Yeah, and that encouraged me to think that I was on the right path. But The Who were on tour in 1980 and the only new album out was mine, and my song Let My Love Open The Door had become a [US] Top 10 hit. So it was strange for the band and strange for me, and I didn't quite know how to handle it.

How did you decide if a song was right for a Pete Townshend solo LP or a Who album? Is it whether Roger Daltrey can sing it?

Pretty much that, yes. It's well-known that Roger and I are very different on a number of levels. But one substantial level – and it's not Brexit – is the spiritual function of music. I shouldn't try and speak for him, but I think Roger would agree that music has a social function, a societal function and even a political function. But there are songs on *All The Best Cowboys Have Chinese Eyes* that have very spiritual roots.

HOWEVER SPIRITUALLY INSPIRED Townshend felt, by summer 1981 he was battling alcoholism, had moved out of the home he shared with wife Karen and daughters Emma and Aminta, and had started work on *All The Best Cowboys Have Chinese Eyes* at Oceanic, his boathouse home studio on the River Thames.

During its making, Townshend struggled to stop drinking and embarked on an extended lost weekend that saw him overdose in the bathroom of London's new romantic haunt, Club For Heroes, and dabble with heroin and freebase cocaine. "I just took anything I could lay my hands on," he said at the time, "because I hated the sensation of not being drunk."

However, Townshend emerged on the other side, sober, reconciled with his family and with what he now describes as "my absolute favourite album".

What appeals about *All The Best Cowboys…*?

I don't think I've ever stood so naked on an album, and I can still listen to it all the way through without getting irritated with myself. I certainly prefer it to *Empty Glass*, which feels like me trying to be The Who.

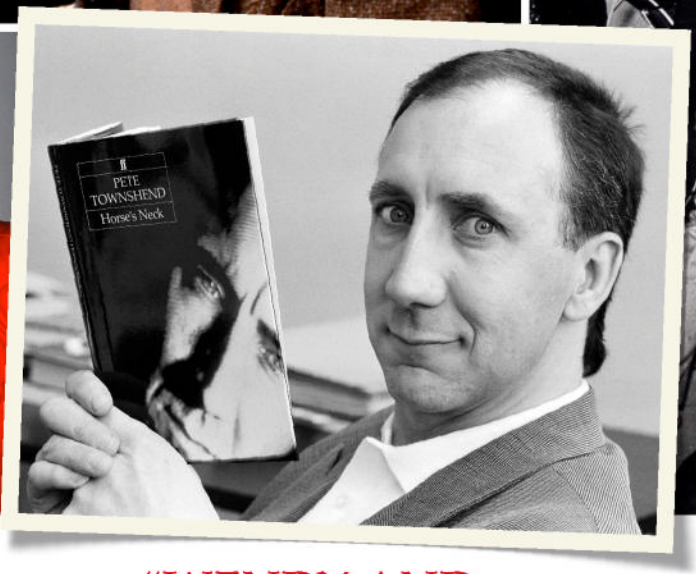
Is it very autobiographical?

Yes. The song Stardom In Acton is about my hometown, Acton, and my two younger brothers wanting to be in music. My brother Paul gave it up but he had a go, and Simon now plays with The Who. The Sea Refuses No River is like Sufi poetry, an open-hearted cry in the sense that I was losing everything that felt dear to me. It also touched on the romanticism of another rock performer, Bruce Springsteen, who I'd been seeing a lot of at the time.

Would you use the phrase 'Chinese Eyes' in an album title now, though?

I don't know whether I would or wouldn't. The

Getty (3), Tony Gale/Alamy, Allan Olley/Mirrorpix/Getty



title came from that poetic idea of Hollywood cowboys looking tough and alert. But I fund an art studio in Shanghai with my old art school teacher [Roy Ascott] and my Chinese students would hate it if I pretended that they weren't different to us. Their processes are very different, there are ethnic and historical differences, but when it comes to art we are all on the same page.

The album reached the US Top 30 but failed to match *Empty Glass* or *Face Dances* for hits. Was that disappointing?

Yes. The song Slit Skirts was, literally, about getting old. I was only 34 and regarded myself as a dead loss. I played that song at the second Prince's Trust concert [in July 1982] and one of the reviewers said, "Here's Pete Townshend, millionaire, super famous rock star, moaning about getting old… Who gives a fuck?" But it's *my* fucking album and I love it and it's really precious to me.

Your work rate then seems incredible now. You went straight from *All The Best Cowboys…* to making a new Who LP, *It's Hard*.

What happened is I'd gone to Orange County to see Dr Meg Patterson and try the [neuro-electric therapy] 'Black Box' cure to get me off [the painkiller] Ativan. I'd become very, very addicted when I stopped drinking. I went to see her and it took a month. Then I went straight from rehab to join The Who. It was too soon,

The band had started *It's Hard* without you.

Yes, I turned up and they were in [producer] Glyn Johns' studio in Surrey making a record and [ex-Amen Corner vocalist] Andy Fairweather Low was in my chair. I love Andy, so I didn't mind, but God knows what they were recording.

"WENDY AND LISA TOLD ME PRINCE BASED PURPLE RAIN ON *QUADROPHENIA*. I NEVER KNEW THAT."

I don't know what I'd given them. But I won't accept what Kenney Jones said: "You've taken the best songs for your solo album and left us with this dross." That was insulting. But I probably needed time to come up with a few more tailor-made songs for the record.

You didn't get much support from the band?

No, John Entwistle kept his dangerous stuff, his fun stuff, for outside of The Who, because he found it difficult when Roger criticised his songs or wanted to change them for any reason. He didn't feel Roger was qualified to do that. So he kept it all to himself.

Roger Daltrey has said that *It's Hard* shouldn't have been released.

Yes, Roger came in and said, "I'm not agreeing to this album going out. It's just not good enough." But we were contracted and we'd taken most of the fucking money. So we had to put it out. It should have been more diverse, or maybe it was too diverse. I don't know. I've listened to it recently and it's not half bad. Really, what The Who needed at the time was a fucking psychotherapist.

How so?

We needed an artistic manager like [original Who managers] Kit Lambert or Chris Stamp, but we didn't have them. Bill Curbishley was a fantastic, practical manager, but not an artistic one. So we missed a crazy guy like Kit or Chris coming into the studio and saying, "Get rid of all this! Fly to the south of France, get smashed and make an album with Rick Rubin!"

Talking of which, The Rolling Stones hired thirtysomething Andrew Watt to co-produce their last album. Is that something The Who might consider?

Well, we are talking about the past today, but I would certainly not consider going into a studio with Andrew Watt. He is a very good friend of mine, but I know he would put me to work, and in two weeks we would end up with an album he'd be very happy with and I wouldn't (*laughing*). However much fun one might have, it would be too much like hard work.

Did you really think The Who's 1982 tour would be their last?

I felt like we were going through the motions. But I never signed up to a final tour. That was the promoters and the managers' idea. I only signed up to take a sabbatical, but it didn't occur to me to say so at the time.

PETE TOWNSHEND'S SABBATICAL began with a surprise career change and his appointment as Associ- ➢

ate Editor at Faber & Faber in 1982. But landing a famous rock star was also a coup for the publishing house. Townshend wrote a book of short stories, Horse's Neck, and commissioned Brian Eno and Eric Burdon, and biographies of Hendrix and The Kinks.

"I didn't realise the reason I'd been invited into Faber was because rock'n'roll was something they wanted," he says. "But taking the job was as much about family as anything else. My kids were growing up and I wanted to be sat in a traffic jam taking them to school, and being around for their teenage years."

Within a year, though, he was making *White City: A Novel* (its subtitle a jokey nod to *Tommy* being described as a 'rock opera'). Townshend used the titular Shepherd's Bush housing estate as his backdrop for another semi-autobiographical story. Always fascinated by multimedia before the term was invented, he made an accompanying short film where he played himself, alongside Frances Barber as his ex-girlfriend and future Game Of Thrones actor Andrew Wilde as his childhood friend, Jimmy, named after the central character in Quadrophenia. "Yeah, the post-war bunch, again," Townshend offers.

How did White City come about?

That was me wanting to make a movie. I was inspired by seeing Purple Rain and wanted to make a story about my neighbourhood, growing up. I recently had a brief e-mail exchange with Wendy and Lisa from Prince's band, who told me that Prince based Purple Rain on *Quadrophenia*. I never knew that. A colleague at Faber recommended Richard Lowenstein, who'd made INXS's videos. Richard read my film treatment and said, "This is rubbish," tore it to pieces and then we put it all back together again.

Were you happy with the film?

I think it could have been great, but we ran out of money. Also I was playing myself and I think I look nervous and ill at ease. I've never felt so embarrassed in my life as I was pretending Frances Barber had been my girlfriend. I couldn't do what was necessary, which was to look her in the eye.

Why is that?

I don't know, but I always think about the time [The Lovin' Spoonful's] John Sebastian came to my little studio. We started work and he did this thing where he played harmonica and stared into my eyes with so much love and a desire to communicate. I had to say to him, "Please just stop. You have to listen, you have to understand, I am *English*!" (*laughing*). It's happened on-stage with musicians too, and it always embarrasses me.

Did Roger Daltrey give you acting advice?

No, and Roger is a really good actor. But really, I've been acting all my life. On-stage? Yeah. That's not me. I don't know who it is. I trust my acting better now. I just did the [Tonight With] Jimmy Fallon show for Tommy opening on Broadway, and I went on and started acting. I think a lot of celebrities do the same in public.

You formed a six-piece group, Deep End, with moonlighting Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour, backing vocalists and brass players to promote *White City*. Were you tempted to take this band further?

I was very tempted. I realised with Deep End that I could surround myself with fabulous musicians, and just pay them. That's all the respect and honour they wanted. But I'd been brought up in this fucking co-op called The Who where everybody had a role. But we put up three nights at Brixton Academy and the third night didn't sell. On the second night, just before I go on-stage, my wife rang to say our youngest daughter, Minta, was seriously ill. And I thought, What am I doing? I'd gotten away from The Who and being away from the family, and now Dad's back working on the fucking oil rig again.

Your record label dropped you when *White City* failed to sell in the UK, and you re-formed The Who to play Live Aid in July 1985. But a full reunion wouldn't happen until 1989. What had you learned while you'd been away from the band?

That I know how to structure a song, and when I do it, The Who fucking listened. The Who took what I did and made it bigger and better.

When you look at your solo projects, including the current Tommy The Musical on Broadway, do you ever think The Who held you back artistically?

No, but when I first went out with The Who, although the guitar smashing was genuine, I thought we'd be a one-hit wonder and then I could go back to the sanctity of art college with my smart buddies and pretty girls. If I'm trying to recover any of that with my – what would you call it? – Renaissance-man multi-tasking, it's realising that art and performance can be connected, and the person who made me understand that was Yoko Ono.

How was that?

When she was doing what they called 'happenings' in London in 1967, and making films and going on-stage and singing – if you can call it that – I understood I could express myself artistically by breaking things. It's conceptual art. I know people will now be going, "You fucking pretentious, pompous idiot!" OK. But that's me.

IN NOVEMBER 1985, TOWNSHEND was the subject of an edition of the TV arts programme, The South Bank Show. He told the host Melvyn Bragg that "rock'n'roll, at least by my definition, was finished." Bragg argued that this was an "arrogant, parochial view." "And he was right," admits Townshend, today.

"PETE WAS SO NICE AND ENCOURAGING"

DAVID GILMOUR ON HIS MID-'80s COLLAB WITH TOWNSHEND. MARK BLAKE FEELS THE BROMANCE.

PETE TOWNSHEND and David Gilmour were in musical limbo and thrown together by circumstance in the early '80s. The Who had played their farewell tour, Pink Floyd were in a state of flux, and their guitarist had taken a sabbatical to make his second solo album, 1984's *About Face*.

"We were recording a piano at Pete's Eel Pie Studio, and I bumped into him in the corridor," Gilmour tells MOJO today. "Pete told me how much he liked my first solo album [1978's *David Gilmour*]. We were chatting, and he said that if I had any bits of music to send them along. He was so nice and encouraging."

By his own admission, Gilmour was not a natural lyricist – a job that fell to Roger Waters in Pink Floyd. Townshend duly composed lyrics for three of Gilmour's songs. Love On The Air and All Lovers Are Deranged appeared on *About Face* (with Townshend's All Lovers… demo later included on his *Scoop 3* collection). But Gilmour found the lyrics for the third piece too personal, and passed. Instead, Townshend set his words about a west London housing estate ("a black violent place") to Gilmour's music for White City Fighting on his next LP, *White City*.

"I think Pete feels some restrictions on what he'd like to do with The Who, as I guess we all feel restrictions with everything we attempt," said Gilmour about the collaboration in 1992. "I know he's felt uncomfortable about certain things – things he could express in solo stuff."

The bromance continued, with Gilmour playing on both White City Fighting and Give Blood from Townshend's then-new LP. Soon after, he was drafted into Townshend's new ensemble, Deep End, a nouveau showband with horns, backing vocalists, a harmonica player and a sharp-suited Townshend singing lead vocals and performing old-school Mod dance moves.

"It was a *great* band," declares Townshend. "Simon Phillips on drums and David Gilmour on guitar – just those two guys on their own would change the world musically."

The love-in proved short-lived, and Deep End only lasted a handful of dates and one memorable appearance on The Tube. By the end of 1985, Gilmour was planning a new Pink Floyd, minus Roger Waters, and Townshend, in his role as Associate Editor at Faber, was soon pursuing music hall giant Max Wall to write his autobiography.

In at the…: Deep End, with David Gilmour (left), Brixton Academy, November 2, 1985.

Adrian Boot/urbanimage.tv, Getty (3), Alamy, Bang Showbiz, Heritage Live

Dig the new breed: (clockwise from left) Townshend takes a leap of faith during The Who's set at Shea Stadium, New York, October 12, 1982; backstage after U2's Hammersmith Palais gig, June 9, 1981 (clockwise from left) Bruce Springsteen, U2 manager Paul McGuinness, Adam Clayton, Townshend, Bono; plant life with Daltrey at the King's country estate, 2023; with Jimmy Fallon and the Tommy cast, New York, March 26, 2024; "a brand and a friendship" – Roger and Pete in 2023.

"I KNOW PEOPLE WILL NOW BE GOING, 'YOU FUCKING PRETENTIOUS, POMPOUS IDIOT!' OK. BUT THAT'S ME."

The Who weren't finished either. In 1989, Townshend re-joined Daltrey and Entwistle (with session ace and ex-Deep End drummer Simon Phillips) for a 25th anniversary reunion. This set a pattern that stretched into the current century, with The Who continuing to tour, with drummer Zak Starkey, even after Entwistle's death in 2002.

Waggishly referred to as 'The Two', Townshend and Daltrey have found a way to make it work. They celebrate The Who's legacy minus their once irreplaceable rhythm section, and with a pragmatic understanding that the music is arguably bigger than the musicians who made it – or the writer who composed most of it.

How is your relationship with Roger Daltrey these days?

It's better than it's ever been. I wish it were more intimate, but that's not possible because we are so different. But we value and respect each other more. There are only a few other bands that have this.

Who else?

You see it with the Stones. Sadly you don't see it with Macca. But there must be someone out there who can sit with him and evoke the old days – and, of course, it's only Ringo. If you still had Paul and John, they'd be on different paths, but if they were persuaded to do something for a global charity you'd see that old dissonance come back, but you'd also see how music works to bring people together. The interesting thing about Roger and I now is it's not a band.

How would you describe it?

It's a group of musicians that Roger has chosen. I have not chosen any of the musicians I tour with – not even [drummer] Zak [Starkey]. When Roger brings me on-stage I am filling the shoes of a guy called Frank Simes, who Roger tours with solo, and who is a guitar player and musical director.

So you are now copying the musician who copies you?

Yes. And when I can't pull it off, guess who pops out and says, "I can do it! Me!"? My brother, Simon (*laughing*).

How do you feel about that?

I'm not 100 per cent happy, but it's me celebrating my life and music. So I am happy to do it. Someone reading this will say, "Stop fucking complaining, Townshend, and put a band together of people you *do* want to use." But that scares the shit out of me.

Why is that and who would you use?

I'd get Simon Phillips on drums and Pino Palladino on bass, and I'd dig 'Rabbit' out of his bed, and I'd get some fabulous shredding guitar player… but the trouble is, they'd all be far, far superior musicians to me. Look, although I said I wouldn't pick this current band, they're still great musicians. It just feels easy and safe. But there are still places in the show where I can express myself. I'm no Joe Satriani, but I'm playing pretty well, and Roger is singing great. His voice went for a few years, but he fought to get it back.

So The Who aren't over yet?

I thought it was, around the time of these two records we're talking about. But not now. The Who are a brand and a friendship, but it's not a band. It's not a hard-working, complicated, growing and evolving fucking jazz group. We're not challenging each other to work musical miracles, but we're playing music we know so well. So never say never.

THE BIRTH OF BELLE AND SEBASTIAN

Elle Zober

Stuart Murdoch: In that first year [1996] we made two LPs [*Tigermilk* and *If You're Feeling Sinister*] and wrote songs for a bunch of EPs. In 1990 I'd seen a medical specialist: "You've got post-viral ME – chronic fatigue syndrome." I'd had a really active 1980s, running marathons. Then I couldn't even get out of my room. Next I was back at my folks' house and I'd started writing songs. With *Tigermilk* I was scared somebody would say, "No, you've got to stop. You've got to go back to your pit."

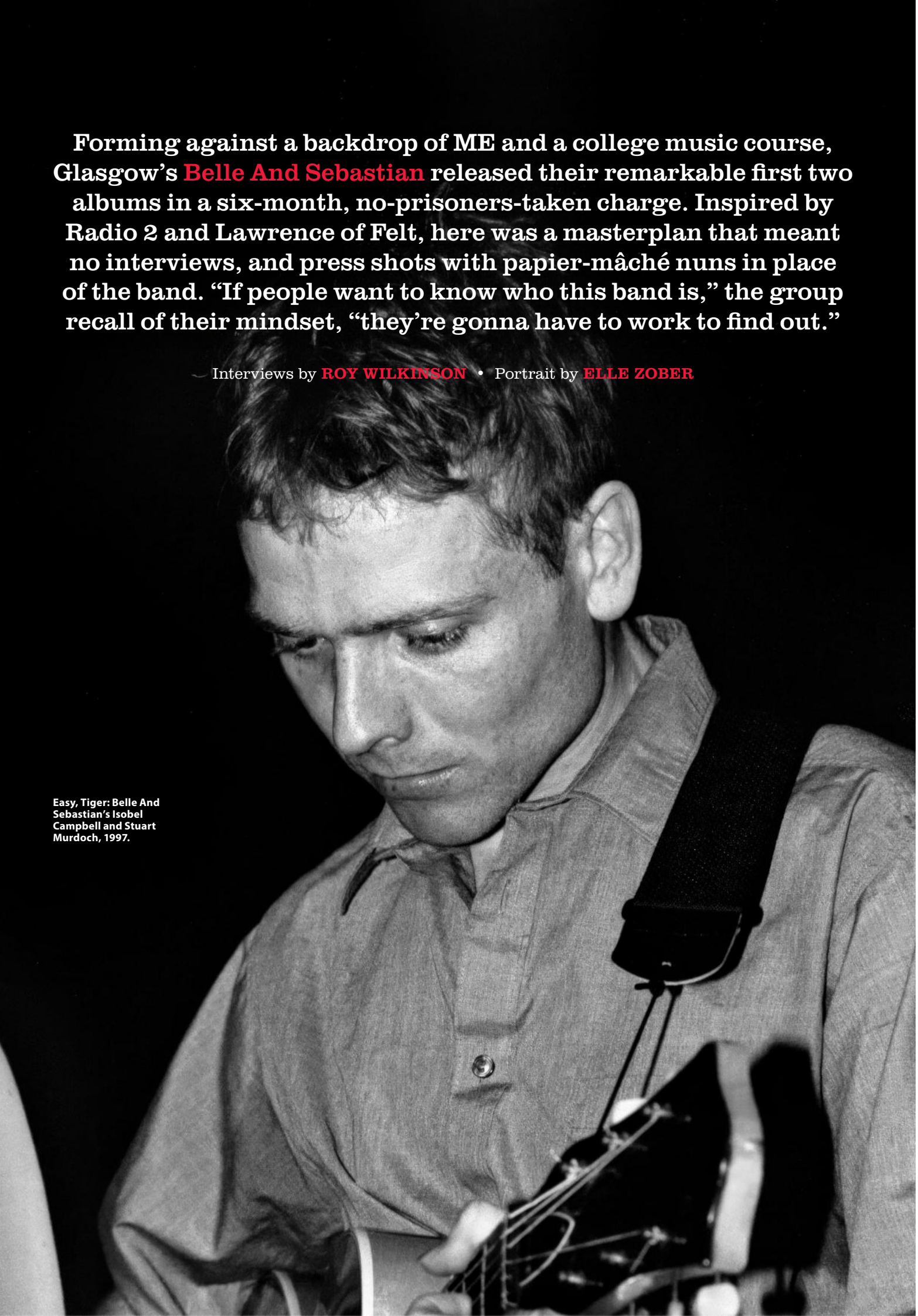
The catalyst for the band was when I was asked to put an LP together at Stow College – a small college in Glasgow that had a music business course I was on. Alan Rankine [formerly of The Associates] was one of the people overseeing the course.

Stevie Jackson: Alan was fantastic. Funny as hell and someone who'd done it, navigated the music industry. On the course the idea was to make a three-track EP and then market it and promote it. Murdoch moved things from a three-track EP to a 10-track album.

Alan Rankine: Stuart had a stubbornness about him. He wasn't going to let anyone tell him how to run things.

Forming against a backdrop of ME and a college music course, Glasgow's Belle And Sebastian released their remarkable first two albums in a six-month, no-prisoners-taken charge. Inspired by Radio 2 and Lawrence of Felt, here was a masterplan that meant no interviews, and press shots with papier-mâché nuns in place of the band. "If people want to know who this band is," the group recall of their mindset, "they're gonna have to work to find out."

Interviews by **ROY WILKINSON** • Portrait by **ELLE ZOBER**

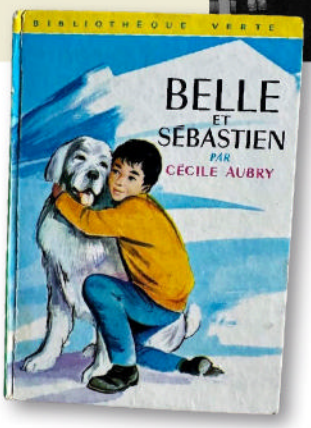


Easy, Tiger: Belle And Sebastian's Isobel Campbell and Stuart Murdoch, 1997.

Sinister feelings: (clockwise from left) Stuart David stuns the nun; trumpeter Mick Cooke, Murdoch and Stevie Jackson, New York, 1997; the B&S volleyball team, 1997; the original canine Belle with 'Sebastian' actor Mehdi El Glaoui and author Cécile Aubry, 1969.

"I'D BEEN THROUGH A FUCKING SHIT TIME. I WANTED TO COME INTO THE LIGHT."

Stuart Murdoch



SM: I'd been around the music industry for a while. I'd spent night after night as a roadie. In the late '80s I worked as local crew at Queen Margaret Union [in Glasgow]. I'd sat on the stage when the Pixies played – Galaxie 500, Happy Mondays, The Go-Betweens. I knew what I wanted. I knew what worked.

While I was writing songs, I was looking for guidance. I hitchhiked down to London with some demo tapes. I went to Radio 1 and left one for John Peel. I had the address for Lawrence [former frontman with Felt, currently mastermind of Mozart Estate]. I went to Pimlico where he lived and stood outside the door. Then I thought, "I'm not going to do this." I turned around and went back to Glasgow.

SJ: [*Tigermilk*] was recorded and mixed in five days. I don't remember more than two or three takes on anything.

Isobel Campbell: It was fun. I think we'd have paid for that experience. Stuart had waited so long for that moment. People [in Glasgow] used to laugh at him. I remember Stephen Pastel saying, "Your songs have too many chords." I'd first noticed Stuart when I went to see Edwyn Collins DJ-ing at Madame Gillespie's, this really fun tranny club. Stuart was there, like this storybook character. Janet Jackson's Escapade came on and he was dancing in his velvet bell-bottom flares and clogs. My friend nudged me and said, "You should go out with him." And I thought, Should I?

Richard Colburn: We released the album on Electric Honey initially, the label at the college. The students invited the record industry up to Glasgow for a showcase gig. Alan Rankine had so many people up, Geffen, you name it.

AR: Everyone wanted to sign them. Sony, BMG, Seymour Stein…

RC: Stuart got on the mike and said, "Thanks for coming up to Glasgow, but we've already signed a deal." [The band signed to new independent label Jeepster].

SM: With *Tigermilk*, in retrospect, the benchmark was *Rattlesnakes* [the 1984 debut album from Lloyd Cole And The Commotions]. It just hangs together so well. I didn't mention [The Commotions] at the time. I thought, Does Eric Cantona think about George Best when he's scoring goals? (*laughs*)

I also decided I wouldn't do interviews. I wanted to get on with what was in front of me. I didn't want to talk about the middle-of-the-road '70s records that were there in my heart – records like Andrew Gold's Never Let Her Slip Away on Radio 2, (*sings*) "I talked to my baby on the telephone/Long distance." I wanted to do Andrew Gold, but talk about mental illness. I'd been through a fucking shit time. I'd seen a dark side and I wanted to come into the light. I couldn't have made those records unless I'd had those years of wilderness [with ME].

Chris Geddes: [The *Tigermilk* album sleeve] was totally Stuart's decision. The overall aesthetic direction was totally Stuart's at that point. Everybody flags up parallels with The Smiths' sleeves, but Blue Note was also in there. We all had the book of Blue Note sleeves because you could get it for a fiver.

SM: On a whim, I asked Joanne [Kenney, Murdoch's then girlfriend] if I could take her photo for the cover. I suggested she sort of breastfeed the toy tiger we had. I can't recall if she just stripped off or if I suggested it. Joanne kind of took over the idea. I wanted something a bit sexy. One thing ME taught me is we have limited energy, so I had no cringe factor. I was going to tell you about my dreams, I was going to tell you how I felt (*laughs*).

The song The State I Am In is based on a dream [the opening song on *Tigermilk* ran, "My brother had confessed he was gay… He stood up with a sailor friend/Made it known upon my sister's wedding day"]. I have a brother, I have a sister, but the song was a dream. My brother worked in the merchant navy, still does. Years later my brother's kid said, "Did you really think my dad was gay?" (*laughs*). My brother was very supportive. He got it.

CG: Mark Radcliffe played tracks from *Tigermilk* on the radio, but there was also a sense, initially, that people weren't that interested.

SM: We printed a thousand copies and it was part of the college course to do promotion and send them out to industry people, so there were only 600 left to sell. I took them around shops in Glasgow. One copy just sat there in the window, fading, all through the summer. One review was four out of 10. My dad said, "Does that mean you've got to do it again?"

RC: And now that album's worth two grand or whatever…

SM: I did send Lawrence a copy of *Tigermilk* and he came to our first London show. We played I Don't Love Anyone, which has the line "The world is as soft as lace," which is quoting a Lawrence song. I enunciated that line very clearly so he could hear it. I also sent a copy of *Tigermilk* to

Courtesy Jeepster Records, BNA Photographic/Alamy Stock Photo

El et quam nos autem dolupatat. Dem ut is a on ius ut in comnim Richard Colburn, Stuart Murdoch, Isobel Campbell, Stuart David, Stevie Jackson. ium a dicid mos est

Morrissey and wrote him a letter. Never heard back. Who didn't like The Smiths?

Sarah Martin: I didn't play on *Tigermilk*. I joined for *If You're Feeling Sinister*. [It] was done in a week.

SM: [For …*Sinister*] my benchmarks were *Court And Spark* by Joni Mitchell and *Tapestry* by Carole King. We had a few working titles for the album. Cock Fun and Falling Sentry Blades… Sentry Blades was a kind of Christian title, about Jesus being stabbed on the cross. At the time I wouldn't call myself a Christian but I was definitely thinking about God. Then I took a photo for the sleeve, of my friend Ciara [MacLaverty]. Suddenly those other titles didn't fit.

SJ: Our press photos were out on their own. They didn't feature the band. My favourite was the one with just Patch, the dog-on-wheels toy. I wish we could have our press photos like that now… the label was Jeepster and they'd just started. At a meeting Stuart said, "We're not going to do anything you want us to do." They were like, "Yeah! Fine!"

SM: I was doing a photography course. I'd been on courses for unemployed musicians, then I was bumped over to photography just so they could say I was doing something. Every week they gave you a reel of film and access to a darkroom. I'd go into Glasgow and take pictures of people. I bumped into Alex – Alex Huntley, who became Alex Kapranos in Franz Ferdinand. I took a picture of him with his beautiful bicycle and that became one of our press pictures. There was an exhibition with a papier-mâché nun. The nun became another press photo.

RC: Stuart had a really strong vision. We were coming through Britpop – bombastic, expensive photo shoots. Stuart was like, "If people want to know who this band is, they're gonna have to work to find out."

Sarah M: [The press shots] are little visual stories. I don't think there was anything combative to it. Someone laying their hands on a nun was closer to what was happening than a photo of the band.

IC: Stuart and I went to London to master …*Sinister*. That's when we… [got together]. He said, "I loved you from the minute I saw you." It became tricky later, but we got the first two albums out the way before it got troublesome.

SM: It became a tensh-fest, full of tension. Instead of seven democratic people within a group, we were a couple in a group. It became tricky. I was not a good boyfriend to Isobel.

IC: It was a no-brainer [deciding to leave the band in 2002]. I didn't want to be singing songs about school when I was like 40. I had to figure myself out and be free.

RC: [In 1998] we went to Paris to meet Cécile Aubry [author of the Belle et Sébastien novel, the basis of the TV series]. We were asking, retrospectively, if it was OK to use the name. It was me and Isobel and Stuart. [Aubry] wanted to make sure our intentions were honourable. It was the same day Scotland were playing Brazil in the World Cup. We took the Eurostar and it was mayhem. Fish from Marillion was on the train in full tartan regalia… We talked with [Aubry] and she understood quickly the music wasn't going to be any negative association.

SM: I've always thought *Tigermilk* was terrific. And I thought *Sinister* might be the best collection of songs I'd ever write. I think that stands. Recording *Tigermilk*, we caught lightning in a bottle. We were a little disappointed with how …*Sinister* sounded but, over the years, that's the record people really picked up on.

SJ: I love these albums. They're the springboard for me still being here 28 years later. I don't think there's one song that doesn't resonate with me today.

CG: As soon as I'd started hearing Stuart's songs I thought they were bloody great – a gift for melody, taking harmonic left turns like Burt Bacharach or Brian Wilson. Stars Of Track And Field is a favourite. I can't imagine another lyricist who'd have the phrase "terry underwear" in a pop song.

IC: If I hadn't been in the band I'd have bought those records.

Sarah M: The songs on …*Sinister* are amazing. They're the walls, the foundations.

SM: When I look back today, I wouldn't change a thing.

Belle And Sebastian host The Glasgow Weekender on August 2 and 3. Isobel Campbell's new album Bow To Love is out now on Cooking Vinyl. Alan Rankine quotes from Belle And Sebastian: Just A Modern Rock Story by Paul Whitelaw.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

● Stuart Murdoch (singer and songwriter)

● Stevie Jackson (guitarist)

● Chris Geddes (keyboards)

● Sarah Martin (violin)

● Richard Colburn (drums)

● Isobel Campbell (cello, vocals)

● Alan Rankine (music-course tutor and former member of The Associates)

Getty, Elle Zober (6), David Corio/Getty

LEARNING TO FLY

Sixty years ago, David Crosby, Gene Clark and Roger McGuinn bonded over a love of folk music and The Beatles. With Michael Clarke and Chris Hillman, they became THE BYRDS. What followed – jealousy, schism and divergent paths to equally wondrous music – has never erased the chiming folk-rock sound of the original band. "The five of us had a magic," discovers GRAYSON HAVER CURRIN.

Photograph: GUY WEBSTER

DAVID CROSBY TAUGHT ROGER MCGUINN HOW to drive.

It was July 1960 in Los Angeles, and Crosby, the son of a cinematographer, was playing a lead in Samuel Beckett's play Endgame at the Ash Grove. He would emerge from a trash can, spout some lines, and descend again. McGuinn was a teenager on tour with The Limeliters, a grinning group of commercial folkies in town to cut a live album, also at the Ash Grove. A son of Chicago who'd matriculated to the then-new Old Town School of Folk Music before he was 15, he loved Leadbelly and Josh White, Earl Scruggs and Pete Seeger. Crosby was relatively new to music, having played just a few shows in coffee houses, so McGuinn showed him some chords. McGuinn – Jim in those days – was relatively new to the city, so Crosby showed him around.

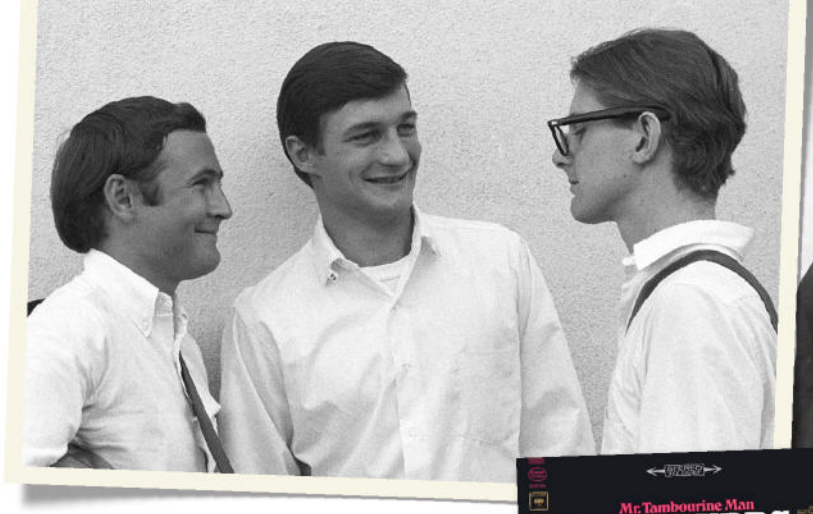
"You didn't need to drive in Chicago. You could walk everywhere," McGuinn tells MOJO, laughing as he recalls getting behind the wheel of Crosby's convertible. "He had a stick shift, and I went up this steep hill, worrying about braking and clutching. At least he had a good sense of humour about it."

McGuinn's Limeliters session was done, so they continued north to Santa Barbara, where Crosby had grown up. His mom made the kids lamb-and-avocado sandwiches, the first time McGuinn had ever seen this strange fruit. He spent the night, then took the bus into San Francisco. "I thought," remembers McGuinn, "I want to be friends with *him*."

Only four years later, the world was radically different. By the summer of 1964, John F Kennedy had been assassinated. The Cold War was simmering on multiple fronts. And months earlier, The Beatles had shaken the nation from trauma on The Ed Sullivan Show. McGuinn and Crosby had both been to New York, passing baskets on the city's peculiar folk ➢

Guy Webster

Changing the times: The Byrds in November 1965 (from left) Gene Clark, Chris Hillman, Roger McGuinn, David Crosby, Michael Clarke.



Getty (2), Henry Diltz, Barry Feinstein, Don Paulsen/Getty

scene, and were both back in Los Angeles, Crosby giving it another go with folk fare. Obsessed with gadgetry and technology since he was a child, McGuinn, however, had started to discover something new. Sat in The Folk Den, the front room of Hollywood musical locus the Troubadour, Gene Clark, another folkie in exile, saw it happen.

"He was sitting in a corner strumming his 12-string guitar and singing a Beatles song. I thought, Man, this guy's got the right idea," Clark remembered. "We decided we'd become… a duet, doing the English style. So we started writing songs immediately."

That's where Crosby found the pair, playing Clark numbers that, he later recalled, "just pulled me like a magnet." He added a high harmony. He wanted in on this new sound, grounded in folk but shimmering like The Beatles.

McGuinn had doubts. "It was beautiful, but I wasn't quite sure I wanted to work with David," he says. "He had an addictive personality and a slight drug dependency. He said, 'I want to be in your band,' but we didn't really *have* a band. We were just writing songs."

Crosby put his cards – or, rather, his connections – on the table. He had worked with Jim Dickson, a proven producer at LA jazz label World Pacific who had been given a key to record upstarts, off the books, at the label's studio near Beverly Hills. Crosby vowed he could get this ad hoc trio some time. "I'm like, You're in," says McGuinn.

Less than a year later, the world had changed again, because of the band that began to take shape that night. Adding drummer Michael Clarke and bassist Chris Hillman, they cut a version of Mr. Tambourine Man that pioneered the folk-rock idiom, and on two albums – *Mr. Tambourine Man* and *Turn! Turn! Turn!*, released during a six-month span in 1965 – reignited rock's imagination and reshaped its future.

"They're cutting across barriers which most people who sing aren't even hip to. They know it all," said Dylan that year. "If they keep their minds open, they'll come up with something fantastic."

THE KID THOUGHT THAT THE BEATLES WERE downstairs.

A few months after the five Byrds began playing together, when they still called themselves the Jet Set, Jim Dickson arranged a meeting with Ben Shapiro, an area impresario who ran the jazz hotspot Club Renaissance. Dickson hoped Shapiro could get the band some gigs, so they schlepped their instruments to his house one afternoon. After several songs, his daughter rushed downstairs to meet The Beatles, only to find five unknown longhairs. The next day, though, Shapiro told the story to his client, Miles Davis. "Kids have a way of knowing these things," Davis nodded.

"So Miles calls Goddard Lieberson, the president of Columbia, and says, 'You know that rock band you've been looking for? I think I've got them,'" remembers McGuinn.

The preceding middle months of 1964 had been, by necessity, a period of rapid growth for the quintet as they survived on, as McGuinn once put it, "one hamburger a day". With Crosby on bass and McGuinn and Clark on guitars, they recorded at World Pacific while Dickson hunted a label. Elektra agreed to issue a single, so long as they'd play with a hired rhythm section and go by The Beefeaters. Please Let Me Love You, an oversung Beatles facsimile complete with "Oh, yeah" harmonies, fizzled.

They doubled down, looking for their own rhythm section. That summer, Crosby and a hitchhiking teen named Michael Dick, who could have been Brian Jones's stunt-double, had found themselves in a van of hippies in Big Sur. Dick had played drums in a few amateur acts, so he slapped a conga while Crosby sang. Crosby soon called to offer him a job. Michael Dick became Michael Clarke.

Crosby, meanwhile, was looking to shake off bass duties, insisting he couldn't play it and sing tenor. He coveted Clark's guitar, so he began to chide the skills of the Midwest country boy. "He started telling him he was no good," Dickson told Clark biographer John Einarson. "Gene didn't resist it."

Then Dickson rang Chris Hillman, a California mandolin enthusiast who'd been working in folk and bluegrass circles. He'd been enchanted by McGuinn at the Troubadour and, later, a World Pacific session. Bass? No problem. "I had never held a bass," Hillman later wrote, "let alone played one."

On the turn: (clockwise from far left) The Beefeaters, 1964 (from left) Crosby, Clark, McGuinn; New Christy Minstrels, 1963, with Gene Clark (middle row, second right); The Byrds during the *Mr. Tambourine Man* cover shoot; with Miss Universe contestants, Miami, July 1965; guitar men McGuinn and Crosby.

"WE WEREN'T A GOOD BAND, LIKE THE BEATLES. BUT THE SCENE WAS THE BEST *SCENE* EVER. IT WAS LIKE A BUBBLE, A FANTASY."
Roger McGuinn

They practised relentlessly. Staying at the cheap Padre Hotel, McGuinn and Crosby would take the circuitous bus route to the apartment Clark, Clarke and Hillman shared, rehearsing by day. So broke that Clarke played cardboard drums, they would later head to World Pacific to record rehearsals and listen back. "Bands go through a period where they're garage bands, and they're learning how to play," Crosby said later. "It takes them a long fuckin' time." But the recordings made it clear where they had to improve: "We went really fast."

They traded five per cent of their profits in perpetuity for $5,000 from Naomi Hirshhorn, the daughter of an entrepreneur and powerful art collector. Having seen and studied A Hard Day's Night together, they had a gear list ready: a six-string Gretsch, a 12-string Rickenbacker, and a Ludwig drum kit. (Hillman stuck with the red Japanese bass he'd found for $50. Clark required only a tambourine.)

"I traded in my five-string banjo, like Pete Seeger played, some cash, and my acoustic Gibson that Bobby Darin had given me," says McGuinn, remembering how Darin replaced his homemade 12-string guitar after accidentally smashing it on-stage. "And I got that Rickenbacker."

A complete line-up, a deal with Columbia, a bevy of gear: now, they needed a better name. For Thanksgiving dinner, they gathered at the home of Eddie Tickner, a Navy veteran who had partnered with Dickson to manage the band. As they stared at the turkey, Clark suggested Birdses, the title of Dino Valenti's new carousel-like paean to nature. Too cute, McGuinn countered. The Birds?

Then, in another nod to The Beatles, they misspelt it: The Byrds.

ACTUALLY, THERE WAS ANOTHER HURDLE: THE Byrds' Columbia contract was only for a single. If those songs were good enough, and especially if they yielded a hit, they could be optioned for an album. They'd already endured rejection with The Beefeaters and Elektra. This time, it needed to be right.

Dickson urged them to lean into their collective folk roots, not to settle for Beatles pastiche. He wasn't sure if Clark's songs were suitable for their initial radio attempt, and he didn't know if McGuinn could find the right traditional to repurpose. That summer, Dickson received the gift of his career from Dylan's publishing company: an acetate of an unreleased song, Mr. Tambourine Man. Dylan had recorded a wonderfully out-of-sorts, out-of-tune take with Ramblin' Jack Elliott, but it wasn't going on an album.

"Crosby *hated* it – 'I don't like it, man, and that folky 2/4 time is not going to play on the radio,'" says McGuinn, chuckling. "But I liked the song."

McGuinn got to work, incorporating bits of a Bach chorale into his Rickenbacker line. He slashed through the maze of verses to focus on the second, since its wanderer evoked Jack Kerouac and its references to boot heels suggested The Beatles' couture. He'd trimmed it to less than 150 seconds, the high end of radio play. What's more, Dickson had instructed everyone in the band to read Constantin Stanislavski's tome, An Actor Prepares, so they could invest in their material. Applying what he'd learned, McGuinn saw Mr. Tambourine Man as a prayer.

"There's method acting going on. I was singing to God, because he was Mr. Tambourine Man," says McGuinn, who had been raised Catholic but had recently started studying the Indonesian spiritual practice Subud. "It is a submission to God."

Clark had always been perceived as the lead singer, his deep voice the anchor around which McGuinn and Crosby would harmo- ➢

"THEY'RE CUTTING ACROSS BARRIERS WHICH MOST PEOPLE AREN'T EVEN HIP TO. THE BYRDS KNOW IT ALL."
Bob Dylan

nise. But Dylan's reedy tone and the coruscant guitar pointed to McGuinn. He had stepped definitively into the front. "None of us were very good, except Roger," Crosby later confessed. "He had this other talent, which was to be able to arrange – to translate – from a folk idiom into this early rock'n'roll stuff."

Mr. Tambourine Man was first attempted at World Pacific, Clarke's rolling drum line supplying a sense of vertigo. This wasn't it. In January 1965, when the band had its first date at Columbia's Los Angeles studio, Clark, Crosby and McGuinn sang. Then Clark and Clarke headed to San Francisco while the legendary Wrecking Crew came in to finish the backing. (Clarke later turned down drum lessons from The Wrecking Crew's Hal Blaine.) Only McGuinn, then, played on The Byrds' genre-forging debut.

"Oh, they *hated* it," McGuinn says of The Byrds' feelings about the ringers. "But I loved it, because I was thrilled to play with the big guys. There probably wouldn't have been a Byrds if we had to play Mr. Tambourine Man ourselves."

That is, the record got them their deal.

BUT THE BYRDS DIDN'T WANT TO BE THE BAND that couldn't cut its own tracks. It was time to woodshed.

While those recorded rehearsals at World Pacific had been crucial, their Columbia contract meant they needed somewhere new. They began gathering in the basement studio of Vito Paulekas, the legendarily mischievous leader of Los Angeles' freak scene. As they played, a slew of young dancers would fill the room, swirling through cigarette-and-joint smoke. "It was something like you'd see in one of those psychedelic movies," McGuinn says. "People were naked and painted and dancing like demons."

The Byrds soon moved to Ciro's – an old Hollywood standby on the Sunset Strip that had fallen out of favour but was staging a second life as a rock club – and so did the dancers. Lines began to snake around the block. The A-list started to arrive. Sal Mineo sat alone at the bar, taking in the scene, while Jack Nicholson and Peter Fonda caroused. Sonny and Cher perched near the dancefloor, taking notes on the band's rendition of Dylan's All I Really Want To Do. And in late March, Dylan himself stopped by, watching The Byrds until Dickson urged him to climb on-stage for Jimmy Reed's You Got Me Runnin'.

"We weren't a good band, just not some solid unit like The Beatles," admits McGuinn. "But the scene was the best *scene* ever, what we had created. It was like a bubble, a fantasy. Everybody in Hollywood was looking for something different. We were the new wave."

Good band or not, they were, Columbia relented, perhaps ready to record their own songs. As spring began, The Byrds returned to Columbia's sprawling Studio A in LA. Crosby's Dylan resistance had eroded, so they cut three more of his songs. Clark had so many tunes that he'd been taping solo demos with Dickson; he offered five, including two co-writes with McGuinn. His equivocal but magnetic breakup song about a woman he'd met at Ciro's, I'll Feel A Whole Lot Better, transcended folk rock, setting the stage for powerpop.

Still, The Byrds' roots in folk and path out of it remained plain, epitomised by the chiming rendition of The Bells Of Rhymney that ended the first side. As a teenager, McGuinn heard Pete Seeger perform this account of a Welsh mining accident at Chicago's Orchestra Hall. "Everybody obviously wanted to get their own songs on the record, and Gene had the most," says McGuinn. "But we all appreciated this traditional folk stuff, and it was beautiful."

At Ciro's and in the studio, The Byrds had mostly sported matching suits with skinny ties or jackets atop turtlenecks. One night at the club, though, another band – perhaps that of Little Richard, featuring Jimi Hendrix – swiped the suits, just as The Byrds were to wear them on their album cover. Captured by the fish-eye lens of Barry Feinstein in Griffith Park, they're instead insouciant and cool in their street clothes, less stiff than the matching Beatles. That was the start of The Byrds' looming fashion revolution: Crosby in his cape, McGuinn in his spy glasses, Clark in his denim jacket. The Byrds were finding a separate path.

On June 26, Mr. Tambourine Man reached the top of the Billboard chart, days after the album that took its name was released. A week later, they played Jane Fonda's Fourth of July house party, the biggest American rock band suddenly mingling with the country's biggest film stars, including Fonda's father, Henry. "Dad buried a pig and cooked it in banana leaves," Fonda tells MOJO today. "Groucho Marx, Danny Kaye, William Wyler, Warren Beatty, Jay Sebring: it was a meeting of old Hollywood and new, the first time."

And then, at last, The Byrds hit the road – perhaps a little too

Barry Feinstein, Derekk Taylor, courtesy of Dolores DeLeon, Getty (2), Henry Diltz

Cruising altitude: The Byrds (from left) Crosby, Clark, Hillman, McGuinn, Clarke, on Ready Steady Go!, London, August 6, 1965; (below) Dolores DeLeon with Hillman, McGuinn and Crosby, late '65; (opposite, clockwise from top) with Bob Dylan at Ciro's, Sunset Blvd, March 26, 1965; Hollywood host Jane Fonda, 1966; signing on during 1965's US tour.

hard. They climbed into a Trailways bus with stiff upright seats and journeyed east. The dancers from Ciro's followed along, stupefying Midwestern audiences. They were, McGuinn said at the time, "too extreme for this part of the country." They gigged in high school gymnasiums and small theatres, where coiffed teenagers would sit on the stage apron, staring at Gene Clark as if he were some Apollonian statue. Michael Clarke signed underwear, and gushing women swarmed every dressing room. "This Trailways bus… was fuckin' horrible, but the shows were excellent," Crosby said. "We knew what we were doing."

The British press soon disagreed. Former Beatles publicist Derek Taylor had taken on the band (for a percentage of profits, natch) after hearing an advance copy of Mr. Tambourine Man. Given The Byrds' American success, he was eager to show them off in the UK. He had raved about the find, writing, "It was something over and above normal rock experience" in Melody Maker.

But a UK tour in August '65 went badly. Trekking from Nelson, Lancashire to Portsmouth's Guildhall, a flu that started with Hillman spread. The Byrds barely moved on-stage, and the musical cracks beneath their professional veneer showed. On August 14, Melody Maker delivered another pronouncement: "'Flopsville' was London's verdict on the much-publicised Byrds," opined Chris Welch. "It proves they can't beat The Beatles yet."

HOWEVER EXHAUSTING, THOSE CONSECUTIVE tours weren't musically fruitless.

The day after The Byrds settled on a name in November 1964, McGuinn and Hillman had returned to the Ash Grove to watch Kathy And Carol, a folk duo who'd recently released a beautiful debut. McGuinn caught the eye of Dolores DeLeon, a Mexican-American server who, days later, tracked down his room number at the Padre Hotel.

She arrived with a bottle of wine. He pulled his Rickenbacker 12-string from beneath the bed and crooned Bobby Vinton's Blue On Blue. They fell fast, renting an apartment as The Byrds' popularity skyrocketed. She was an early booster, feeding the band at the Ash Grove and verbally sparring with Dylan at Ciro's.

In July, DeLeon trekked from Los Angeles to Chicago in a harrowing road trip to meet McGuinn's parents and climb aboard The Byrds' uncomfortable bus for a few dates. Sitting in the back, where the band could puff pot smoke into paper cups to avoid detection, DeLeon suggested McGuinn play Turn! Turn! Turn!, the segment of Ecclesiastes Pete Seeger had turned into a song. McGuinn had already recorded it with Judy Collins.

"I didn't play it in a folk fashion, because I'd been so conditioned to play things in rock'n'roll," McGuinn remembered in a 1969 radio interview. "We looked at each other and said, 'That would be a good single, wouldn't it?'"

Dickson disagreed, McGuinn says now, the manager arguing that a religious text would lose a rock audience. But producer Terry Melcher vouched for its near-Zen suggestion of acceptance and impermanence, especially as the United States escalated its Vietnam involvement. He was right: The Byrds toured West Coast radio stations after its October release, asking DJs to try it. In December, when the album that took its name was finally released, Turn! Turn! Turn! became the second Byrds song to top Billboard – and the first they'd made as a band.

"I played the second guitar part on the intro with a dropped ➢

Full circle: recording *Byrds* at Wally Heider Studios, LA, November 1, 1972 (from left) Crosby, McGuinn, Clark, Hillman.

D tuning," Crosby said. "I didn't really start experimenting with serious alternate tunings until later on, but… that's the slippery slope. That's the rush, like the first time you do heroin."

Crosby's prescient bit of ingenuity seemed an anomaly for suddenly tense sessions. With his chiselled abs, strong jaw and sweeping hair, Clark – standing out front, slapping his tambourine – had become the star, even if he'd ceded lead vocals and second guitar. He'd earned plenty, too, since his I Knew I'd Want You was Mr. Tambourine Man's B-side. He revelled in Hollywood indulgence.

"He made enough money to buy a sports car and we didn't. That did create a lot of dissension," McGuinn told Clark's biographer. "We were real jealous that he'd had so many songs on the album that we all wanted his airtime."

While Crosby continually sparred with Melcher, McGuinn allied with him. They pushed several Clark gems off the record while adding Dylan covers that lacked the revolutionary sparkle of Mr. Tambourine Man and All I Really Want To Do. Hillman, 40 years later, called a closing cover of Stephen Foster's Oh! Susannah "a waste of tape… of time."

In her book In The Wings, a behind-the-scenes gaze into the band's salad days, DeLeon remembers McGuinn playing guitar with Dylan's road manager, Bob Neuwirth, at all hours in New York. Neuwirth coronated McGuinn "the Stephen Foster of his generation" and challenged him to pay tribute to the 19th-century songwriter. "I had this theory that if you took any old song and put a Beatle beat to it, it could be popular," McGuinn says. "I showed it to Neuwirth, and he said, 'You guys ought to record it.' It was a joke."

THINK I'M GOIN' BACK

1973's Byrds reunion was full of promise. Then the sales figures came in, finds Grayson Haver Currin.

VERSIONS OF the events that led to *Byrds* – the 1973 reunion album of the foundational quintet – have always varied. There's been talk of a cruise where everyone except Crosby mingled, memories of a session where everyone was invited. But at least in 2024, McGuinn recalls a 1972 visit from Crosby and manager Elliot Roberts at his Malibu home.

The last several Byrds albums had hinged on the great guitarist Clarence White (who would die in July 1973, run over by a drunk driver): "That was probably the best musical band I ever worked with," says McGuinn. But the always-forthright Crosby had an overarching criticism: "He said, 'You know, some of the stuff you guys are doing is all right, but some of it isn't,'" remembers McGuinn. "And I had to agree."

Having become a bona fide star in Crosby, Stills & Nash, Crosby proposed they get the old crew together and make a third record, so long as McGuinn swore to God he'd shelve his latest version of the band. "I said, 'David, you don't even believe in God,'" McGuinn says, laughing. "He said, 'Well, I sort of do, in a way.' Satan believes in God, too."

Their first rehearsals were tense, with no one quite knowing how to manage the renewed relationship, especially after years of backbiting in the press. But as they got to work in Wally Heider's – with Crosby not only producing but also providing star-quality marijuana and a deal with David Geffen's hot Asylum label – some rapport returned. The four songwriters each got two songs, alongside cuts from Joni Mitchell and Neil Young. Working with art director Gary Burden, photographer Henry Diltz captured them on-stage at the Troubadour. He fitted a crane into the room so, as Diltz remembers, "I could get right up in their faces."

In a January 1973 profile in Rolling Stone, they talked of more records and big shows. But reviews and sales were poor.

"We thought we'd tour with this record if it went well and, who knows, just keep going," remembers McGuinn. "But we were not a cohesive unit, just five guys going in different directions. But if it had gone gold, David Geffen would have made us be The Byrds."

Yet McGuinn's dips into the tradition unearthed gems, also. Nearly two years earlier, the night Kennedy was killed, the guitarist – then living in New York, writing at the Brill Building – had walked to the house of singer Bob Carey, agitated and anxious. Carey offered him a tranquilliser, and McGuinn began to strum a haunted blues he'd heard Dave Van Ronk deliver: He Was A Friend Of Mine. McGuinn made the lyrics be about Kennedy. It worked as his balm that night. At the end of side one of *Turn! Turn! Turn!*, The Byrds resurrected the song at a mournful country canter. It was a balm for a nation, reeling not only from news of Vietnam but also triumphs and tragedies within the civil rights movement.

And in their own ways, The Byrds were reeling, too.

IN FEBRUARY 1966, THE BYRDS climbed atop the limbs of a little tree and perched there for Michael Ochs, shooting a publicity still for Columbia. They had always been a photogenic bunch, capable of mirth and cool even if they had the flu or were fighting.

But here, they looked dejected and distracted, Hillman staring at a twig and Crosby conjuring an unconvincing rendition of his impish grin. McGuinn seemed over it. Only Clarke truly posed, holding two limbs like a kid at a playground. And Gene Clark? Literally not there.

As a kid in Kansas City, Clark had been playing on a road that overlooked an airport when a plane crashed. His sister later remembered that he'd seen people emerge from the wreckage, burning. Touring did nothing to assuage his fear; he'd miss shows with the New Christy Minstrels because he wouldn't make a flight. As The Byrds sat on another plane, idling before take-off to Manhattan, those nerves returned with a death grip.

"Gene was in a full-blown panic attack, sweating and screaming, 'I've got to get off this plane, I've got to get off this plane,'" McGuinn says. "And I said, Well, Gene, if you can't fly, you can't be a Byrd."

The pilot opened the door, let Clark go, and reassured the band not only that he knew how to fly but that the plane's systems were hale, "with four engines as strong as a diesel locomotive," remembers McGuinn. The four remaining Byrds went to New York. Clark went home to Kansas, moving in with his parents and slamming the phone whenever a reporter managed to track him down. "He was cranking them out one after the other," Michael Clarke said of Gene's Byrds output in a 1990 radio interview. "I was very sad when he quit, because he was an important link. I loved Gene's songs."

Rationales for Clark's exit abound. He came from a family plagued by depression and addiction; his sudden access to weed, acid, and booze – and, apparently, a whirlwind love affair with a dancer from

"GENE WAS IN A FULL-BLOWN PANIC ATTACK, SWEATING AND SCREAMING, 'I'VE GOT TO GET OFF THIS PLANE.'"
Roger McGuinn

Spread those wings: (top) The Byrds on-stage at the Magic Mountain Music Festival, Mount Tamalpais, California, June 11, 1967 (from left) Crosby, Clarke, Hillman, McGuinn; (above) dressed for success in early 1965 (clockwise from top left) Clark, McGuinn, Clarke, Crosby and Hillman.

the short-lived variety show Hollywood A Go Go – didn't help. He deplored being the sex symbol in one of the country's biggest bands, especially when he felt minimised by McGuinn and harangued by Crosby. Maybe, as others have suggested, he was simply tired of folk rock.

McGuinn insists that, years later, Dickson confessed he was "going to rip Gene out of The Byrds and make an Elvis out of him," an account both Dickson and Clark's biographer rebutted. In any event, Clark was fried: "He was very fragile mentally, in a frail state," says McGuinn. "I always loved the guy. Gene was just tragic."

Clark, however, left The Byrds a momentous souvenir. During that draining British tour of mid-'65, he had palled around with Brian Jones and mentioned an idea for a song that reflected the surreal nature of what they did – getting on jets to go to other countries and play music for strangers who might not like it. Their talk turned into a poem set to a few chords. Back in the US, touring now in a customised Winnebago, he shared the piece with Crosby and McGuinn as they rolled around the country, getting stoned and listening to John Coltrane and Ravi Shankar on tape.

They worked on it together, a welcome contrast to the combative internal politics of *Turn! Turn! Turn!*. The Byrd who soon would not fly had written a song about doing just that. They considered calling it Six Miles High, maybe seven, the cruising altitude of their plane to England. But Eight Miles High had a better ring.

The Byrds recorded it soon before they boarded that fateful plane to New York. This was their entry into psychedelic rock and another rock'n'roll inflection point, where folk rock opened again to let in even wider, wilder influences. They'd have to take that trip without Clark, too.

"WHAT THE BYRDS LOST WHEN Gene left was soul, honesty, a certain wonderful creative streak that was completely different," Crosby told John Einarson. "The five of us had a magic, and I didn't want it to go. The Byrds were done when Gene left."

But The Byrds were not done. Just as they'd helped pioneer folk rock, they would soon trailblaze for psychedelic rock (thanks, in part, to Clark's Eight Miles High) and country rock after they jettisoned Crosby and enlisted a young singer-songwriter from the South, Gram Parsons.

Membership of The Byrds became something of a carousel. The strength of the band had often stemmed from its members' differences, and so it continued. Line-ups that included guitarist Clarence White, multi-instrumentalist Gene Parsons, and bassists John York and Skip Battin continued to find new space to explore at the intersections of folk, rock and country.

Ironically, it was an ill-fated reunion for the original quintet, 1973's *Byrds*, that proved their unexpected farewell (*see panel*). Gathering at Wally Heider's Hollywood studio in November 1972 to share songs as they put other projects on hold, McGuinn, Crosby, Hillman, Clark and Clarke briefly glimpsed a second era.

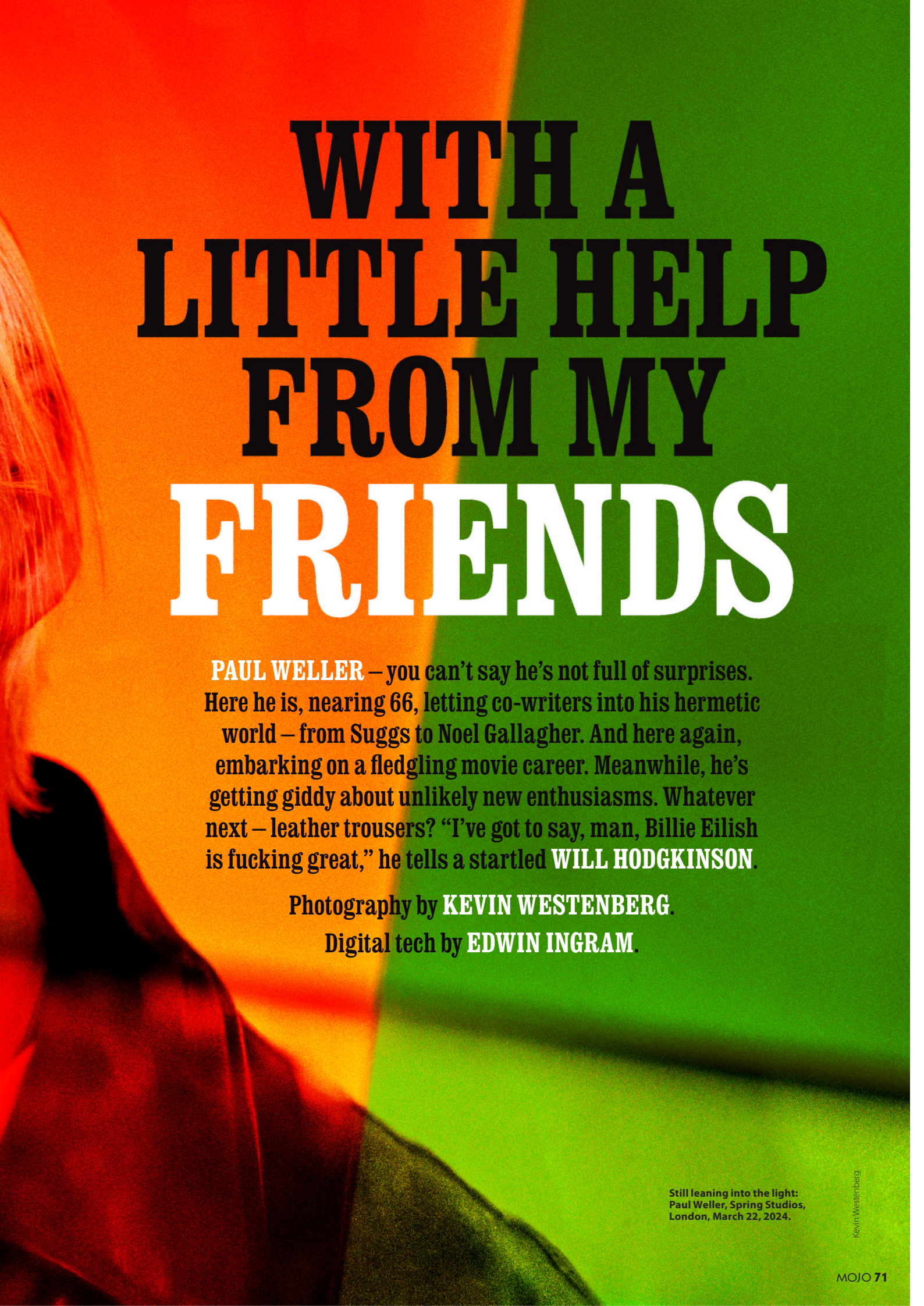
"We thought that was the new beginning of the old Byrds," says McGuinn. If the album had sold, he muses, who knows what may have unfolded? "We could be like The Rolling Stones, still be around."

Henry Diltz (2), Guy Webster

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

PAUL WELLER – you can't say he's not full of surprises. Here he is, nearing 66, letting co-writers into his hermetic world – from Suggs to Noel Gallagher. And here again, embarking on a fledgling movie career. Meanwhile, he's getting giddy about unlikely new enthusiasms. Whatever next – leather trousers? "I've got to say, man, Billie Eilish is fucking great," he tells a startled **WILL HODGKINSON**.

Photography by **KEVIN WESTENBERG**.
Digital tech by **EDWIN INGRAM**.



Still leaning into the light: Paul Weller, Spring Studios, London, March 22, 2024.

Kevin Westenberg

BLACK BARN STUDIO IN SURREY IS, AS A DISPLACED ROAD SIGN perched on a beam above the doorway tells us, Wellers Town. Pass the toilet to the left, with its faded photograph of the Faces in their early-'70s prime, and the kitchen to the right, with its boxes of prawn cocktail crisps and Cadburys Mini Eggs, and you'll come to the control room, where a vast mixing desk stands a few feet apart from a Wurlitzer jukebox. Big Youth's Hit The Road Jack, Donovan's Barabajagal, Bob Lind's Elusive Butterfly and, naturally, The Beatles' Taxman are a few of the 45s in there, waiting to be fired up between rehearsals.

A small office holds the gold discs: 500,000 sales for The Jam's Going Underground, 1.2 million for *Stanley Road*. In the studio itself, where a statue of the Hindu god Ganesh stands on a grand piano, Epiphone, Fender and Rickenbacker guitars line up alongside a bare brick wall, and the drum kit sits under a ceiling painted in strips of red, white and blue, Paul Weller is taking his band through their paces.

"That tempo's good, innit?" says Weller, sitting by a Fender Rhodes piano, pub ashtray and packet of cigarettes within reach, a Mod in relaxed mode in his red crew neck jumper and Levi's 501s. The band are playing Nothing, a co-write with Madness singer Graham 'Suggs' McPherson from Weller's forthcoming album, *66*; it is a plaintive reflection on the loss of innocence adulthood inevitably brings and it feels suited to the phase Weller finds himself in. He's still working hard, feeling out new directions, still thinking about the details, from the length of a trouser hem to the dampening of a guitar string. As he approaches the age signposted in the album title, however, he's a mellower figure than he once was, only too aware that life is finite and it moves faster than you think. Is the drive that will make *66* his 17th solo album since 1992's *Paul Weller* in as high a gear as ever?

"I don't know, man," he says. "A year ago, a few months even, I would have told you that drive would always be there no matter what. Something has happened, though. Not that I would ever retire but I've been thinking lately, and I know this sounds morbid, that I'll be four years off 70 this year. You get caught up: with making records, going out on the road, and I've realised how precious time is. I need to spend it with my kids, my family, my missus."

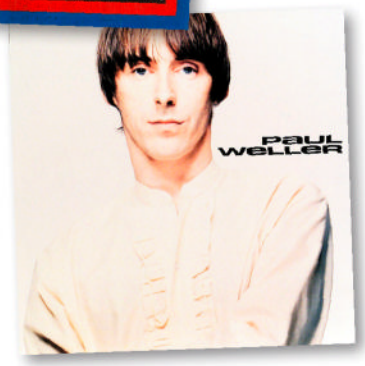
Not that there's much sign of Weller acting on that realisation any time soon. Right now, there is a 27-song setlist to prepare for a tour that will be barely a quarter done by the time you read this, resuming in July and continuing through September in North America, and returning to the UK during October and November.

"That's from Abbey Road," says Weller, pointing to a little red stool with a cracked vinyl cover in the corner of the studio. "I reckon George sat on that when they were recording All You Need Is Love. Can't be sure… Right then. Come on, ladies."

Steve Cradock, Weller's guitar lieutenant for 30 years, gets going on Friday Street, a hook-laden classic from 1997's *Heavy Soul* LP. Jacko Peake, whose tenure with Weller stretches back to The Style Council, comes in with some mournful saxophone. New recruit Jake Fletcher, a youthful thirtysomething in flares and vintage Mott The Hoople T-shirt, gets going on bass, and they're off. Their leader may be easing into a pair of slightly more comfortable loafers, but in Wellers Town, the work never stops.

A COVER SHOOT FOR MOJO IN A PHOTOGRAPHER'S studio in north London and Paul Weller is dressing up for the occasion: tailored maroon trousers, three-button Henley shirt in an oatmeal shade, green cardigan with leather patches on the elbows. Favourites by his beloved Beatles play over the stereo, tea and cigarettes are the strongest stimulants on offer, and during a break in the session Weller finds a quiet corner of the room to talk about the new record.

66, with its primary-colour cover painting by the pop art pioneer Peter Blake, its folky flute moments, soul blasts, Kinksy music hall touches and pastoral string arrangements by Hannah Peel, certainly looks and sounds like a classic Weller album. But it differs from pretty much every other one he has made over a five-decade career for one significant reason. Nine of the 12 songs are co-writes, their lyrics coming from a handful of trusted friends and allies. Noel Gallagher supplied the words to Jumble Queen, not a tribute to the Bridget St John album of that name but a glam-tinged stomper on the conspiracies digital life throws up each day. Dr Robert of the Blow Monkeys wrote some uplifting words for the Philly soul of Rise Up Singing, Primal Scream's Bobby Gillespie tapped into his spiritual side for the all-out rocker Soul Wandering and Erland Cooper – a collaborator since 2018's *True Meanings* album – wrote the reflective Burn Out. It is a rare example of Weller allowing other voices to colour in his world.

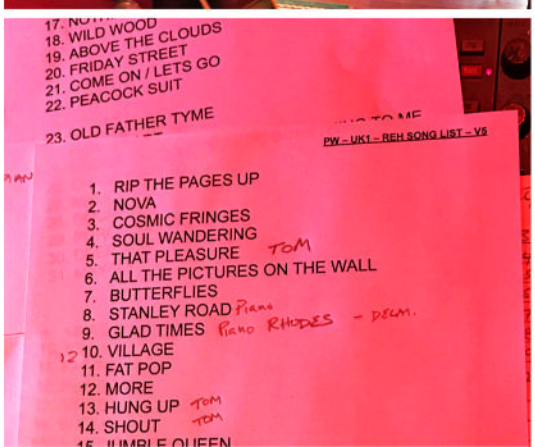


"For most of my life, I've written on me own," says Weller. "I used to be extremely guarded about it, and if people suggested ideas I'd be very clear that this was my thing and I wasn't changing. But in recent years I've been thinking: I've done that, I've proven myself, and whatever I have to say now is in the songs that I did write on *66*. For the rest, I thought I'd ask my friends."

My Best Friend's Coat features whirling Hammond organ, harpsichord and vibraphone running through a cyclical chord structure reminiscent of Michel Legrand's The Windmills Of Your Mind. That comes from Le Super-Homard, a French quintet led by Christophe Vallaint with a European take on the '60s Mod aesthetic, while words about "all the places I've never been" come from Weller. It sounds like ➢

"FOR MOST OF MY LIFE, I'VE WRITTEN ON ME OWN. AND IF PEOPLE SUGGESTED IDEAS I'D BE VERY CLEAR THAT THIS WAS MY THING." PAUL WELLER

Kevin Westenberg, Will Hodgkinson (6)



Welcome to my world: PW keeps an eye on Wellers Town (anti-clockwise, from top left) rehearsing at Black Barn, Surrey (from left) Jacko Peake, Weller, Ben Gordelier, Steve Cradock; Weller moves to piano and (second right)Jake Fletcher joins in; enter Tom Van Heel on keys (second left); (bottom) possible setlists; (top right) the trophy room.

"HE IS AS REAL AS IT GETS"

NOEL GALLAGHER on the uncompromising Paul Weller: "He thinks most of us do the same old same old and get away with it."

I WAS ON MY way to get something to eat when a message appeared: "I've got this tune. Do you want to write some lyrics?" I knew he was making a record but I didn't know what stage he was at, because I hadn't seen him in a while. He caught me at a good moment. I scribbled down some train-of-thought stuff, sent it back to him half an hour later, and that was Jumble Queen. It was all inspiration.

I didn't hear from him until a year later, when I listened to the album for the first time. He asked me what I thought of the album, and I said: It's quite chilled, isn't it? He replied: "Are you fucking saying it's boring?" No! The more you listen to it, the more it reveals itself. The reality with Weller is that the older he gets, the more at ease with himself he is, the better he gets because he's always growing. Maybe a lot of songwriters went through a reflective period during lockdown – how did we get there, where are we going? – so that comes into it too, but there aren't many people I got into as a kid whose releases I still look out for today. There is Neil Young, Morrissey, Johnny Marr and Paul Weller. I'm struggling to think of anyone else.

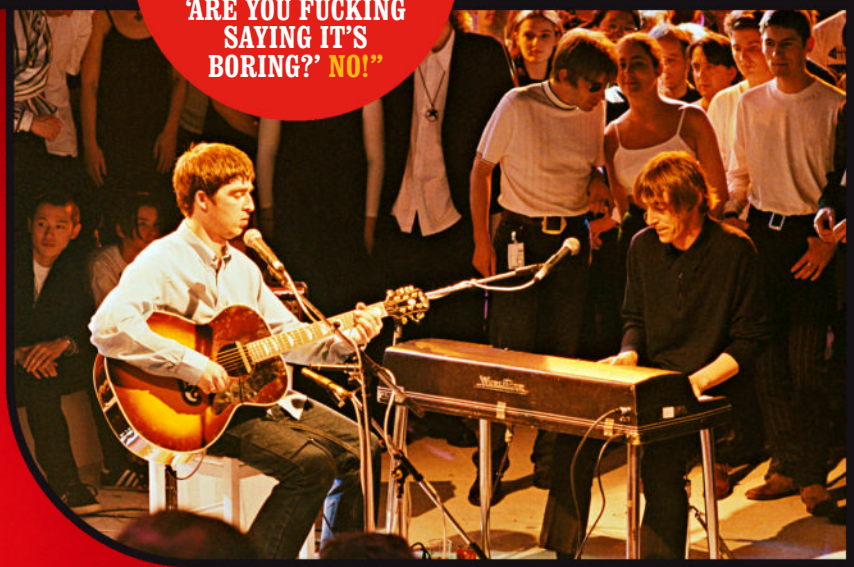
He's always had that drive to do something new – the jump from Eton Rifles to Town Called Malice is immense, and a few months later you're into The Style Council. He actually gets frustrated with artists who are not as forward-thinking as him. He thinks most of us do the same old same old and get away with it. I remember, backstage before one of his shows in the '90s, when someone made the mistake of going: "Fucking hell, won't you just do Town Called Malice?" And there followed a massive row in the dressing room. He wouldn't play anything from the past in those days.

He used to be a lot more confrontational when he was still drinking. One time there was a party at my house in Buckinghamshire and there was a guitar lying around – never a good idea – when someone said, "Come on Paul, play us one of yours." I would have done Wonderwall or Don't Look Back In Anger, so I thought he might at least do That's Entertainment. He did a new one he hadn't even finished yet! There was total silence. It was brutal. I remember one afternoon in the late '90s, being in his convertible Mini – which he bought off my ex-wife, maybe it was going cheap – when we pulled up at a zebra crossing. A lad is crossing the road, and back then, seeing us two on a Tuesday afternoon in Marylebone… it's a thing, right? This lad stops, open-mouthed on the zebra crossing, when Weller stands up in the driver's seat and shouts, "Oi! Get a fucking move on!"

I wouldn't say he's in his pipe and slippers phase – and don't get me wrong, he can still be tricky – but he's certainly a lot more amiable these days. Ultimately the one thing you can say about people like Weller and Neil Young is that it is as real as it gets for those guys, which is why he would never try and rewrite That's Entertainment, or any of those great songs that have formed the fabric of England, if he felt he was faking it. That's why people hold him in the utmost respect, and long may it continue.

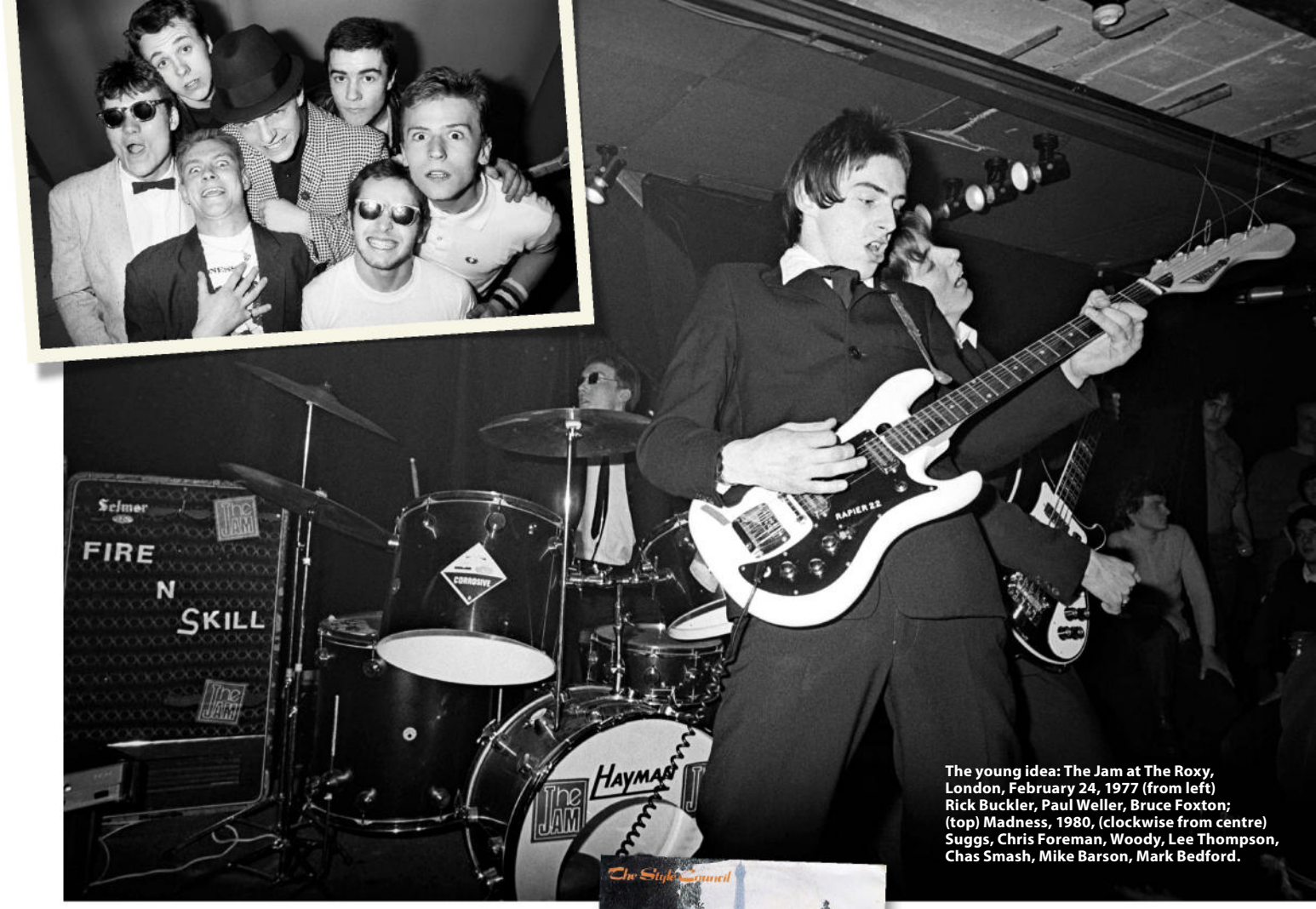
As told to Will Hodgkinson

"HE ASKED ME WHAT I THOUGHT OF THE ALBUM, AND I SAID: IT'S QUITE CHILLED, ISN'T IT? HE REPLIED: 'ARE YOU FUCKING SAYING IT'S BORING?' NO!"



In Mod we trust: (from top) Weller joins Gallagher to perform Oasis's Talk Tonight on The White Room, April 17, 1995; putting the world to rights at the Q Awards, 2006; the Steve Marriott Tribute Concert, London Astoria, April 21, 2001.

Kevin Westenberg, Getty (2), Alamy



The young idea: The Jam at The Roxy, London, February 24, 1977 (from left) Rick Buckler, Paul Weller, Bruce Foxton; (top) Madness, 1980, (clockwise from centre) Suggs, Chris Foreman, Woody, Lee Thompson, Chas Smash, Mike Barson, Mark Bedford.

➢ he's reckoning with the life, or lives, he could have had.

"Could be," he muses. "Perhaps the guy is dipping into his best friend's coat to get some money out. Or it could be about depression, how you can find comfort in it, a coat you wrap around yourself. I approached the words as if they had already been written in French and I was doing the translation, like Jacques Brel and Scott Walker, but this is the beautiful thing about art. Everyone finds their own meaning."

FOR ONCE, PAUL WELLER HAS FOUND HIMSELF in the unusual position of finding his own meaning in words he hadn't written. *66* opens with Ship Of Fools, a gentle acoustic tune that, with its cheery vibraphone and singalong melody, has a chirpy pop feel akin to the hits session men like Herbie Flowers and Roger Greenaway bashed out for mums, dads and kids in early-'70s Britain, and words by Suggs addressing partly his own band, partly Britain's current political landscape. Suggs is one of the few people whose life experiences match Weller's own. Both left behind working-class childhoods to make it in bands that went down a storm in the playground. Both had to find ways to grow up, move on and embrace more complex realities.

"It was a different situation with Suggs," says Weller, when I put this to him. "He was always part of that wonderful dysfunctional family that is Madness and it is the family that stayed together because they needed each other, whereas I never had that. The Jam did not have that sense of camaraderie, brotherhood, comradeship. I finally got to the point where I didn't have to please the other people in the band and could go in any direction I wanted, but with Madness you have a democratic situation, which makes it much harder to move forward. Still, you can't argue with them: tune after tune."

Suggs, however, sees parallels in the way both Madness and Weller were driven increasingly by a sense of melancholy – and social conscience – that inevitably comes with age.

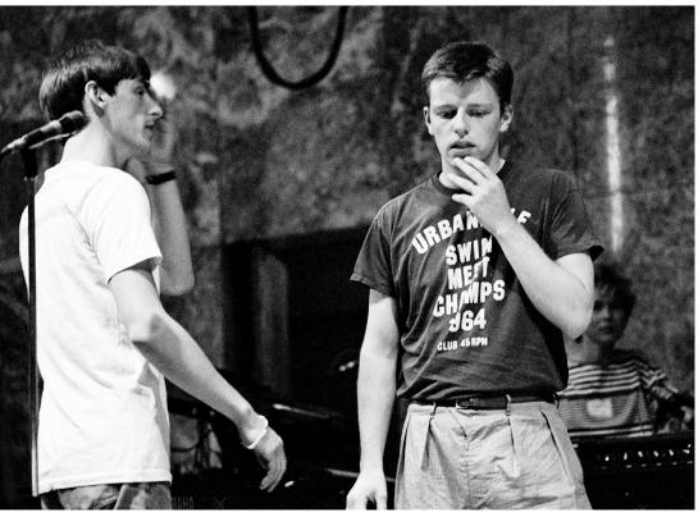
"You get more sophisticated as a musician simply by doing it every day, and for that reason you cannot hold onto that naivety you first appeared with," says Suggs, who first saw The Jam at long-gone punk hangout The Red Cow in Hammersmith in 1977, supporting Slade, of all people. "Madness received an education in racism through 2-Tone while Paul was becoming increasingly political with Red Wedge. We were writing ponderous, mournful songs like Yesterday's Men and One Better Day and there was a big dip in enthusiasm from Madness fans accordingly, while Paul was getting homoerotic with Mick Talbot in the video to Long Hot Summer, and it was blasphemy! It was brave and funny and I liked it."

Nothing, with reflections on childhood – "when we had nothing" – concludes that we leave that past behind whether we like it or not. The words are from a poem by Suggs's old friend Andrew 'Chalky' White – a memoir of their mutual, straitened pasts. It is deeply melancholic.

"It's an English thing," says Weller on that less-than-effervescent strain of not-quite-sadness that's always lurked behind his bullish Modfather image. He points to the window, which looks out onto a slate-grey afternoon sodden with rain. "Look at the ➢

"MADNESS IS THE FAMILY THAT STAYED TOGETHER BECAUSE THEY NEEDED EACH OTHER. THE JAM DID NOT HAVE THAT SENSE OF CAMARADERIE." PAUL WELLER

Kevin Westenberg, Pictorial Press/Alamy, Getty (4)



Come together: (clockwise) The Beatles, captivating Weller at the Royal Variety Performance, November 4, 1963; Weller votes for change with Billy Bragg and Red Wedge, November 1985; feelin' alright with Mick Talbot in The Style Council's Long Hot Summer video, 1983; Weller and Suggs at a Miners' Benefit gig, Liverpool Mountford Hall, July 7, 1984.

Getty (4)

"PAUL WAS GETTING HOMOEROTIC WITH MICK TALBOT IN THE VIDEO TO LONG HOT SUMMER, AND IT WAS BLASPHEMY! IT WAS BRAVE AND FUNNY AND I LIKED IT." SUGGS

weather and ask yourself why we're melancholic. I think a lot of it is down to a lack of sunshine."

Is there more to it than that? Weller pauses. "Without being pseudo-intellectual there has always been music that tries to explain our inherent insecurities and sadnesses. You'll find it everywhere, from the Fabs to classical music."

Perhaps, I suggest, it is also an English thing to be cursed with an inability to enjoy ourselves.

"We have a joke in the band: we need to do a good gig tonight, so let's make it exciting, but not *too* exciting. We are English, after all."

Or, as Suggs recalls, "In the MTV days, Madness were like kids in a dressing-up box. And The Jam would be going: 'Why do we have to do bloody videos?' No wonder Noel Gallagher calls Paul the Victor Meldrew of pop. On day one of working together on *66* I said, Well, it's only music. The phone went silent. He was really cross! To Paul, music really is the most important thing in the world."

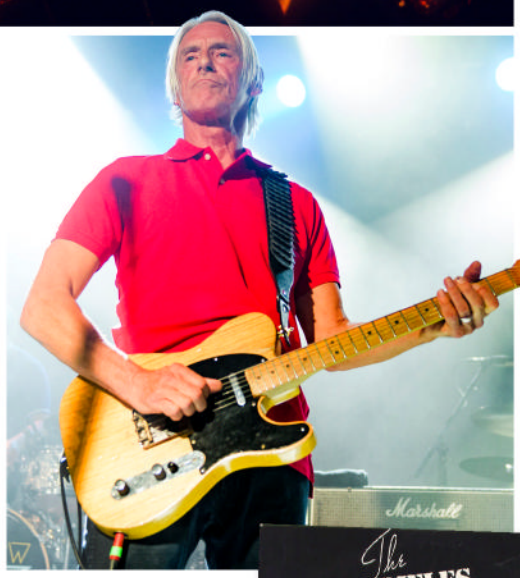
PAUL WELLER CAN TELL YOU EXACTLY WHERE AND when that began: the family living room, Woking, Surrey, November 4, 1963. He was five.

"The Beatles were on the Royal Variety Performance and it was the best thing I had ever seen, man," says Weller, still enthused at the memory. "Mum and Dad had old rock'n'roll records by Chuck Berry, Little Richard and Elvis, which I loved, but The Beatles… It isn't an exaggeration to say they changed the world for many, many people, me included. They made me see other possibilities. They made me think of other things in this life, that there wasn't just this little town, there was a world beyond the city walls and I wanted to be a part of it, to see and feel and experience. The Beatles made life possible to explore for normal people… People like me."

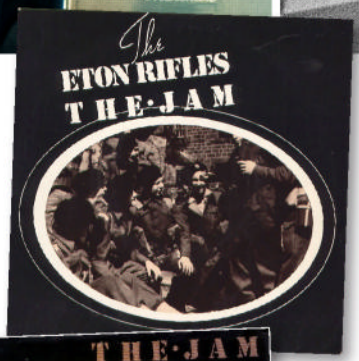
Marianne Faithfull's former husband, the artist and gallerist John Dunbar, once said of swinging '60s hangout the Scotch of St James that if you weren't very rich, very famous or wearing a very short miniskirt, you weren't getting in. It was a world as far from Weller's as it was possible to get. The answer, for a suburban son of a taxi driver and a cleaner, lay in building his own world. Hence forming The Jam with his guitarist friend Steve Brookes at Sheerwater County Secondary School and, once Rick Buckler joined on drums and Bruce Foxton came in on rhythm guitar, building a name for themselves in the pubs and working men's clubs of Woking with a set made up of Beatles covers and emerging originals. Weller started out on bass, but after Brookes's departure in 1976 he persuaded Foxton to switch. The classic trio was in place.

"We go back to 1972, man," says Weller of Brookes, who plays acoustic guitar on I Woke Up, a country-tinged lament from the new album that also features lap-steel accompaniment from Richard Hawley. "Originally it was the two of us, like the Everly Brothers, and back then there were still bomb sites, empty patches of land everywhere. I'm sure the '60s were swinging if you were young and affluent and part of the Chelsea crowd, but for everyone else it was the same as ever: a lot of squalor."

The Jam never fitted in with the art school nihilism of punk: too smartly turned out, too hard-working, too embedded in the Mod philosophy of clean living under difficult circumstances. It didn't



Soul brothers: (clockwise from far left) Weller with Jacko Peake, Gent, October 23, 1992; Weller belts up backstage at The Jam's final London gig, December 5, 1982; on-stage in Madrid, 2023; with artist Peter Blake at the MOJO Honours List Awards, June 11, 2009.



take long for Weller to apply his love of The Beatles, The Kinks, The Who and the Small Faces to the realities of late-'70s, early-'80s Britain. Out of that came epoch-defining singles including October 1979's The Eton Rifles, with its attack on public school cadet corps who have absolutely no chance of being sent to the frontline in another war, and March 1980's Going Underground, with its clipped rage at a military machine funded by taxpayer's money. They're a long way from the soulful belters and dreamlike reveries that have been Weller's more recent modes but they're all, he says, a product of the way he has always written: naturally.

"Eton Rifles and Going Underground came to me very easily because of how I felt at the time, what was happening at the time," he says. "If they came to me easily now I would definitely put them out – but they don't. And every time I would like to address whatever it may be, it proves pointless because I said it 40 years ago and I can't say it any better. Eton Rifles is Boris Johnson and his mob, isn't it? I hope we don't have our young people sent off to fight in some shitty proxy war, but we're still not looking after our own people. Whatever happened to the £350 million a week we were going to save with Brexit?"

All of this sounds like Weller, supporter of the 1980s Miners' Strike, survivor of Red Wedge, is as engaged as ever, so you would expect that to come out in the music. "But I've done it, haven't I? 'You'll see kidney machines replaced by rockets and guns,'" he recites, from Going Underground. "I don't see the point in doing it all over again unless I could find a clever way of saying it, and what's the point of being clever? If it came to me, in a dream or in a moment and I had to get it down, I would. The truth is, those moments don't come to me like they used to."

THERE IS ANOTHER REASON WHY he doesn't go back to all that. Because, apart from in strictly boundaried circumstances – the odd song played live; an in-the-studio Style Council re-formation for the 2020 documentary, Long Hot Summers – he chooses not to.

"Once again it has a lot to do with The Beatles," he says. "That anticipation of hearing the next record… Where are they going next? You're sitting on the boat or the plane with them, and even though I'll never get near to it, The Beatles set the benchmark for the right approach to music. You move on, you experiment, and it has to be said, The Beatles broke up at the right time. I was devastated back then, but I'm glad they did now. Imagine them going through synth pop in the '80s. It would have been shocking."

Weller occupies the pure Mod position of being an experimental traditionalist: following certain rubrics pertaining to taste and style while always on the lookout for the new thing. Famously he still spends a fortune in record shops around the world and remains supportive of new talent: The Mysterines and White Room are two artists who have used Black Barn Studios at Weller's largesse over the past few years, while Say She She, three female singers from Brookyn with a fresh new take on Chic-like disco funk, make an appearance on 66.

"Sometimes I have to stop listening because I can't take it any more and it is going to make me head explode, man," says Weller of his music addiction. "I go to bed and it's going round me head… the house is full of records I haven't even had a chance to listen to yet… there is so much talent out there. Every now and then I think: Should I pack it in? Does anyone want this old geezer in ➢

Getty (4)

THICK AS THIEVES

10 ace Weller collabs presaging the tag-teaming of *66*, by LOIS WILSON.

THE SMOKIN' MOJO FILTERS

Come Together

(7-inch, Go! Discs, 1995)

Inter-generational Britpop luminaries gather at Abbey Road to take on John Lennon's countercultural mumbo-jumbo for the War Child charity album *Help*. Funky, bluesy, upping the Dr. John *Gris Gris* quotient, Weller gives his all. Drummer Steve White and guitarist Steve Cradock anchor the whole thing with M.G.'s-like precision.

ROBERT WYATT

Blues In Bob Minor

(from Shleep, Hannibal, 1997)

Wyatt told this writer that he particularly enjoyed Weller's "inventive" guitar flourishes on this playful tribute to Dylan's Subterranean Homesick Blues. The pair even gave it a live airing with Danny Thompson at 2016's People Powered Concerts For Corbyn show at Brighton Dome.

TERRY CALLIER WITH PAUL WELLER

Brother To Brother

(7-inch, Mr Bongo, 2002)

Tapping into the understated beauty of Terry Callier's 1965 cult classic *The New Folk Sound Of…*, Weller and the Chicago troubadour record this epic acoustic soul protest, with Callier's hushed baritone vocals and Weller's gruffer tones calling for racial reconciliation accompanied by Weller's gentle strum.

PAUL WELLER AND AMY WINEHOUSE

Don't Go To Strangers

(from Amy Winehouse – At The BBC, UMC/Island, 2021)

Their duet on the Etta Jones torch standard provided the highpoint of Weller's set at the 2006 BBC Electric Proms, and the pair revisited the song again for that year's Jools Annual Hootenanny, where joined by Holland's big band, Weller at the piano gives one of his most intense vocal performances.

ANDY LEWIS & PAUL WELLER

Are You Trying To Be Lonely?

(7-inch, Acid Jazz, 2007)

After *As Is Now* and before *22 Dreams* came two one-off collaborative singles – This Old Town (*see above*) and this, with Weller's then-future bassist and cellist Andy Lewis, which placed the singer in an authentic-sounding Northern soul setting. This time Cradock plays drums; Jacko Peake blows sax.

PAUL WELLER & GRAHAM COXON

This Old Town

(7-inch, Regal, 2007)

Reluctant guitar heroes make heart-swelling three-minute Mod anthem which sounds a bit like The Jam and a bit like Blur with Coxon quavering the verses and the pair duetting the chorus. "But there's no turning back/Just forward now," they sing. Next stop, *22 Dreams*.

GABRIELLE

Why

(CD single, The Universal Music Record Label, 2007)

A genuine buried treasure, this classic break-up ballad should have been a chart-topper. Weller definitely thought so. On hearing the original – built around a sample of Wild Wood – he asked to contribute to it, his soulful backing vocals providing the release to Gabrielle's rasping tension.

MICHAEL HOROVITZ ACCOMPANIED BY DAMON ALBARN, GRAHAM COXON AND PAUL WELLER

Ballade Of The Nocturnal Commune

(7-inch, Gearbox, 2013)

Forming an improv alliance with half of Blur, Weller scores the beat poet's spoken-word salute to the Notting Hill Carnival with his Optigan organ (a '70s instrument which played sounds off a pre-recorded optical disc); a confluence of strange lo-fi burbles and glitches and nerve-fraying dissonance courtesy of Coxon and Albarn.

PAUL WELLER VS STONE FOUNDATION

Mother Ethiopia

(12-inch, Parlophone, 2017)

Absorbed by the *Éthiopiques* series, Weller summoned the Addis Ababa spirit in Black Barn with the Midlands soul rebels and a Juno analogue synth. With guard down he goes with the flow, lost in the easy-going, mesmeric instrumental groove as guitars circle and trumpets and sax snake.

SUGGS AND WELLER

Ooh Do U Fink U R

(7-inch, BMG, 2022)

Pre-*66*, Weller and Suggs unite after the former guests on the latter's Love Letters To London Radio 4 show, and together they take a pop at class inequity in the state school system and wrap it in Motown/Trojan-styled sounds as a tribute to their shared '70s youth club experiences.

Union forever: (clockwise from above) Robert Wyatt wears it well, 2000; Weller and Amy Winehouse at the BBC Electric Proms, 2006; with Paul McCartney at Abbey Road, 1995; PW and Damon Albarn at the 1995 Brit Awards; with Andy Lewis in 2008.

Kevin Westenberg, Alamy (2), Getty (3)

◄ the way? But John Coltrane is one of my biggest influences, not because I want to play jazz but because of his aspiration to greatness, and it makes me realise that I'm not taking up any space that would otherwise be occupied by a young band. I'll always go back and nick a bit of Beatles and Kinks because that's what I grew up on, but the real inspiration comes from people now, doing great things."

BACK IN WELLERS TOWN, THE MAN HIMSELF IS putting the band through its paces. "Did it speed up a bit toward the end there?" he asks of Old Father Tyme, a piano-led soul groover from 2020's *On Sunset*. It is part of a setlist that in typical Weller style leans heavily toward the present and the recent past, although The Style Council's Shout To The Top and the title track of 1995's solo career gem *Stanley Road* are in there. Both the band and the audience need to come with Weller on the journey, allow him to take you somewhere new.

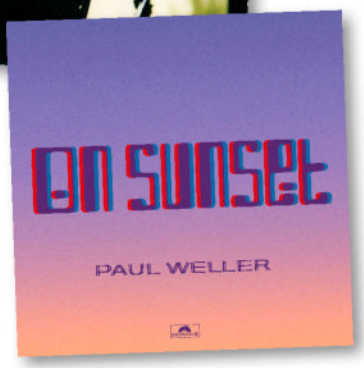
"It is a pretty selfish approach," admits Weller. "I know there are songs people would love to hear in concert. They are a part of their lives and that is a beautiful thing, but I cannot find any connection or contact with them because I'm a different person. I can't find my way into them any more."

The feeling at Black Barn is that once you're in, you're in. Trust Weller and he will trust you back. Oldham's Jake Fletcher, for example, joined the gang after an unfortunate incident: losing his passport.

"It was dreadful, really," says Fletcher during a break in rehearsals. "In May 2021 I was meant to go on tour with The Specials, but I'd moved house and couldn't find my passport anywhere and I let everyone down. It meant that I was in the country, and Paul needed a bass player so I got the job. I came here, had a day to learn 27 songs, and the next day we were on tour."

Steve Cradock has been with Weller since 1993, having first met in the late '80s when he was in his teenaged Birmingham Mod band

"Keep your feet on the ground and your head in the clouds": the Tao of Weller, March 22, 2024.



The Boys. "I really got to know him around '91, when Ocean Colour Scene became the last group to record at Solid Bond, his old studio in Marble Arch," says Cradock. "I learned very quickly that he was leagues ahead: very driven, non-stop, and I've never met anyone like him. A lot of people say songs are sent to them, but in his case you believe it because he keeps on getting these messages."

Cradock has been able to adapt as Weller goes through his changes, although he thinks the transformations have been less dramatic than people think. "Look at *Wild Wood*," he says, citing the 1993 classic often described as marking Weller's surprise late entry into Brit folk fantasia. "Everyone said it sounded like Nick Drake. It didn't at all, but put a flute on it and you're fucked, aren't ya?" As Cradock warns, there are limits to the surprises we can expect: "It's not like he's gonna start setting fire to his headgear like Arthur Brown."

"SOMETIMES I HAVE TO STOP LISTENING TO MUSIC BECAUSE I CAN'T TAKE IT ANY MORE. I GO TO BED AND IT'S GOING ROUND ME HEAD." PAUL WELLER

"I love Steve Cradock to bits," says Weller. "He's my little brother, and he's seen that I'm always trying to reach somewhere else, which is why we've been together for over 30 years. With Jacko [Peake] it is the same thing. These are people who can adapt and rise to the challenge, not just plug in and do what we did last time."

By Weller's own admission, it gets harder to change as you get older. Much of that is down to the realities of how life unfolds – in youth, every day brings a revelation – but that doesn't mean inspiration cannot be found elsewhere. Weller's 12-year-old twin boys are busy discovering '90s hip-hop, his seven-year-old daughter has got into Billie Eilish, and he sees something of himself in all of them.

"I've got to say, man, Billie Eilish is fucking great. What Was I Made For? is an incredible tune. It is lovely to see my little girl playing the record on vinyl and singing along to the words because I'm thinking: That was me and The Beatles. Those early inspirations stay with you for the rest of your life."

FOR ALL HIS PROFESSED INTENTIONS TO SLOW down somewhat, Paul Weller's week still beats your year. He is planning to perform 2020's *On Sunset* in full, with an orchestra, chiefly because the pandemic meant he never got to present that album live. He is starring in a new film by Steve McQueen, having been talked into it by the Small Axe director after protesting that he couldn't act to save his life. There is already another album in the works.

"I'm making a covers record, which I'm thinking of calling Small Town Melancholia," he reveals. "I'll just sing on it and not ➢

"DO TUBE STATION!"

He won't. But you'll hear some of these on Weller's current tour...

A MAN OF GREAT PROMISE

After a Wham! Bam! kick-off – *22 Dreams*-era B-side Rip The Pages Up has opened almost every show on the tour – this bossa nova-inflected tribute to former Jam compadre Dave Waller (originally from The Style Council's *Our Favourite Shop*) eases the intensity, with Weller on acoustic guitar. Jacko Peake (sax) and Tom Van Heel (keys) shine.

SHOUT TO THE TOP!

Forty years since its release as a standalone TSC single, this euphoric Northern soul polemic is a standout live moment. Van Heel supplies the string fills, Peake takes an extended solo that allows the author to take a sit-down break... But keep an eye out for a brief flash of Weller's fancy footwork.

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

"If you don't know this song," Weller told a Welsh crowd in April, "in England, it's replacing the national anthem." *Sound Affects*' singalong mix of grim realities and simple pleasures was reintroduced for Australian dates. Drummer Steve Pilgrim adds a second acoustic guitar. Peake conjures up all the original's little production details.

START!

Eschewing the layers producer Vic Coppersmith-Heaven had piled onto the previous *Setting Sons* album, The Jam's second UK Number 1 single luxuriated in the potential hidden in the space between the notes. In 2024, however, it benefits from the big-band treatment and acts as your warning that a Weller gig is building to a fierce climax.

HEADSTART FOR HAPPINESS

Slower than The Style Council's *Café Bleu* incarnation, and with the vocals now reminiscent of those on the less flamboyant early version released on *Introducing*, this is Weller reinventing a personal favourite from his own songbook by harking back to basics. A much-appreciated counterpoint to the setlist's heavy soul bent.

MY EVER CHANGING MOODS

Modernist gospel, delivered sometimes mid-set, sometimes in a second encore as a pumped-up stomper, but truthfully best heard in its piano-ballad incarnation on TSC's *Café Bleu* (the up-tempo single version feels overstuffed with treats). How much more marvellous would it sound stripped back, *à la* soul-searching Sinatra?

TOWN CALLED MALICE

No finger snaps but otherwise a faithful run-through of The Jam's epochal 1982 single. Perhaps its original Fauxtown arrangement is too strong to allow tinkering, but the smile on his face as he bashes a tambourine is something to behold. At Weller's Leicester show on April 9, it got the biggest cheer of the night.

David Hutcheon

worry about anything else so I won't have to spend all those evenings in my garden, listening to the tracks when everyone else has gone to bed, going: Is this right? It's so intense, man. I need a break from it."

Yet something in Weller's make-up means he can't take a break – from himself, from his work, even as his eighth decade inches into view. Is it still a Mod thing?

"I'm not a great reader to be honest with ya, but Absolute Beginners was a very important book for me," says Weller, citing not for the first time Colin MacInnes' 1958 novel about a young photographer discovering jazz, clothes, sexuality and black culture in post-war Notting Hill. "I was already a Mod, but reading that made me realise that I wanted to leave The Jam, start a new venture with The Style Council, and engage in the purity of the ethos: moving forward, making the best of yourself."

Weller is not one for philosophising. Before he gets on with the more important business of finishing today's rehearsal, however, he does reflect on what, after all these years, he considers the fundamental truth of songwriting.

"There are periods when I've lost faith," he concludes. "Then I realise it's not the faith that's gone. It's just that you've moved away from the rock and lost sight of it. And when you come back to the rock, everything is OK. Whether that is philosophy or not I don't know, but my worldview is simple: keep your feet on the ground and your head in the clouds."

It is time to strap on the Rickenbacker. After all, there are at least half a dozen more songs to get through before teatime.

"IF ETON RIFLES AND GOING UNDERGROUND CAME TO ME EASILY NOW I WOULD DEFINITELY PUT THEM OUT – BUT THEY DON'T." PAUL WELLER

When the two sixes clash: Paul Weller and band on-stage at the Alhambra, Dunfermline, April 15, 2024 (from left) Jake Fletcher, Ben Gordelier, Weller, Steve Pilgrim, Steve Cradock.

Roberto Ricciuti/Getty

MOJO FILTER

YOUR GUIDE TO THE MONTH'S BEST MUSIC

EDITED BY **JENNY BULLEY** jenny.bulley@bauermedia.co.uk

"The entire Ziggy Stardust escapade can now be traced back to one strident demo."

MARK PAYTRESS HEARS THE ORIGINS OF ZIGGY. REISSUES P96

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Good morning, captain

Fairport maestro sailing once more for sadder shores on nineteenth solo LP.
By Jim Wirth. Illustration by Peter Strain.

Richard Thompson

★★★★

Ship To Shore

NEW WEST. CD/DL/LP

"Ship To Shore is a record about defeat, despair and humiliation delivered with an unsettling avuncular twinkle."

SPIDERING HIS way into the bleakest corner of his first album in six years, Richard Thompson sees through the eyes of a soldier struggling with PTSD on the quietly crushing The Fear Never Leaves You. "Numb is heaven, oblivion wealth," sings the 75-year-old master of the dark arts in his customary hangdog fashion. "The spring never uncoils itself."

A folk rock Sisyphus with a guitar that tends to speak its mind infinitely clearer than he ever can, the lugubrious Fairport Convention founder has once more rolled his immense ball of gloom to the top of the hill for *Ship To Shore*. It is a record about defeat, despair and humiliation delivered with an unsettling avuncular twinkle, and a lingering sense that the moments when his spring is wound at its tightest might also be the ones where Thompson feels the most alive.

If fellow folk rock boomers Neil Young, Joni Mitchell or Paul Simon have roamed genres, striving to update their profiles, Thompson's mighty reputation rests on an absolute determination not to broaden his horizons. Since the release of his debut solo LP, *Henry The Human Fly*, in 1972, his model railway-sized musical universe has never really expanded. He likes British folk, pre-Beatles rock'n'roll, a tiny amount of early R&B, Arabic music and psych-pop (he recently told MOJO that the Left Banke's awesome debut is one of his faves), and rarely ventures far beyond his comfort zone. It's a small 'c' conservatism that he shares with such painfully awkward paradigms of British songwriting as Ray Davies, Bryan Ferry, Robyn Hitchcock, Robert Smith and Morrissey, and one that has helped to bring him perhaps the largest collection of four-star album reviews in pop history.

Ship To Shore does not strive to change that narrative. After such a long break from recording, there was the possibility that this new record might mark a change of tack, a *Time Out Of Mind*-style reckoning with mortality, maybe. Instead, it's a collection that finds comfort in more familiar sensations: inertia, existential dread, and romantic disappointments from the mid-1960s. Be reassured: it's a winning combination every time.

The four horsemen of Thompson's apocalypse ride into view on the death's head cèilidh opener, Freeze. "Another day without a dream, without a hope, without a scheme, another day that finds you crawling on your knees," he mutters, standing by meekly and watching the warmth being sucked out of the world around him.

Spartan and unshowy, The Fear Never Leaves You brings that chill closer to home, Thompson's guitar jangling like jailer's keys as he ponders horrors that cannot be unseen. It's a piece of under-writing on a par with such personal triumphs as Roll Over Vaughan Williams, When The Spell Is Broken or his Iraq War grotesque, Dad's Gonna Kill Me.

The beastly big world keeps scratching at the windows on *Ship To Shore*. Donald Trump gets caught in Thompson's crosshairs on Life's A Bloody Show ("Keep on boasting, pound your chest, you always knew you were the best"), while avaricious predators circle the weak and the dying on his hokey trad song The Old Pack Mule.

Thompson's sympathy for the vulnerable and the broken is – one suspects – one that comes from bitter experience. However, if his memoir Beeswing, published in 2021, cautiously opened the book on his complicated upbringing and the trauma of losing his girlfriend Jeannie Franklyn in the 1969 road accident that also killed Fairport drummer Martin Lamble, Thompson's songs on *Ship To Shore* are a reminder that the great psychic wounds of his life may have been inflicted when he was a tongue-tied teenager in Muswell Hill. Over a rockabilly thump, Trust laments the impossibility of negotiating the tight bends of a romantic relationship without skidding into the fence, but the language he uses is very much that of someone who recently had a paper round. "No one told me love's so complicated, dreams get so frustrated, romance is overrated."

Turnstile Casanova confronts more of the agony of love 1964-style, as Thompson finds himself being shunned in favour of what seems to be a leather-jacketed Lothario at the local Gaumont. "This ain't right, crying all night my mind's broken all to pieces," he laments. "She says she will, then she says she won't, my confusion just increases."

The sense of rejection is more profound on the *Forever Change*-ling The Day That I Give In ("you don't want me, you think I'm something tainted"), but Thompson is a glutton for emotional punishment. Another ex from the id emerges on the dreamworldly Lost In The Crowd; as major chords spin into minor ones, Thompson hears the "it's not you, it's me" speech once more. She begs him not to follow, but he does anyway only to find her dissolving into thin air.

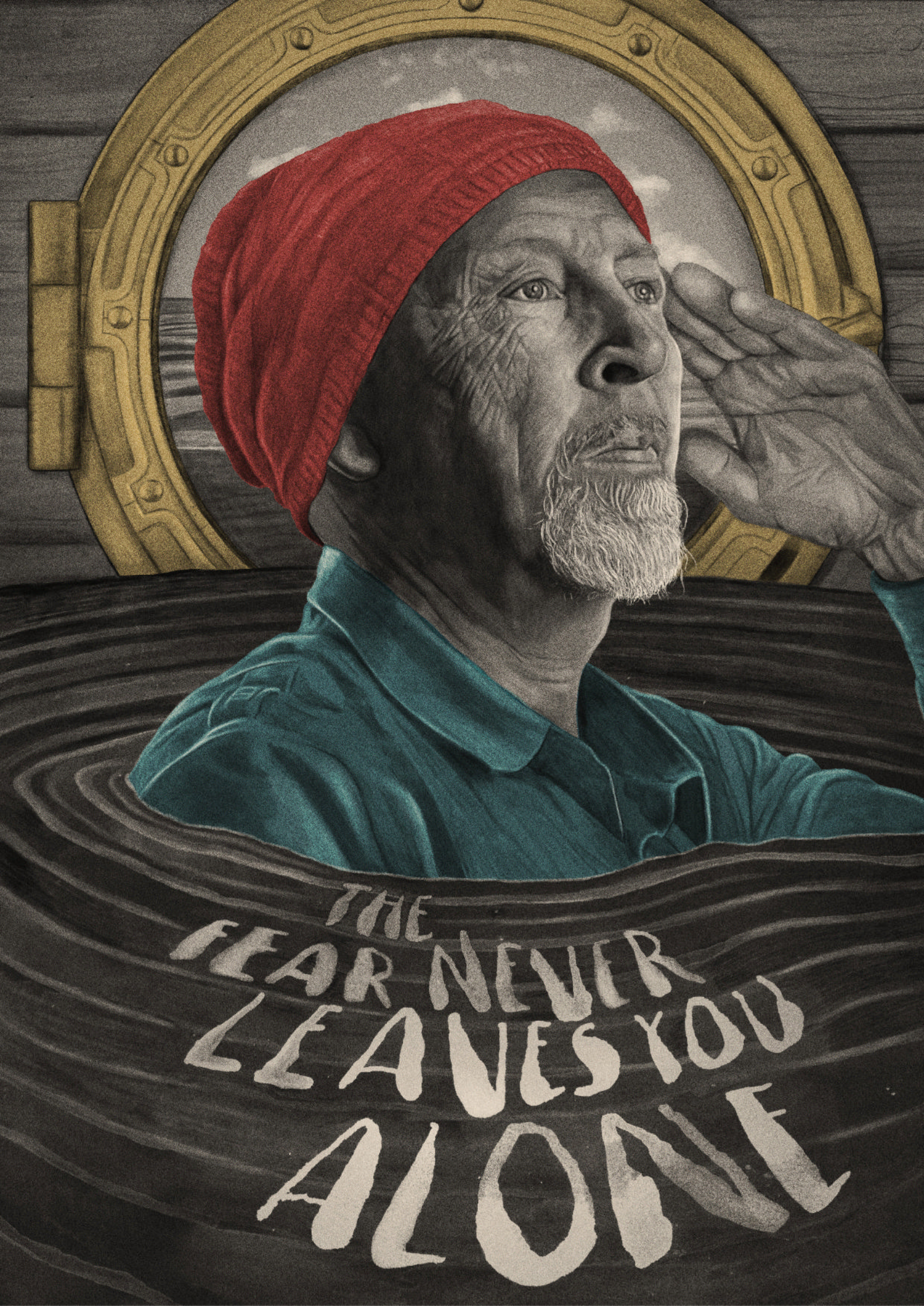
There is only one real love song on *Ship To Shore*, and even that is a slightly wary one. Thompson has said that Singapore Sadie is a stylised portrait of his third wife Zara Phillips (who also features in his backing band here). As seafaring violins scrape in the background, Thompson depicts his dream girl as granite-hard and invulnerable, an impassive power source to be revered – feared even. It is messy psycho-sexual terrain, but pretty much standard for Thompson. The world his songs depict can feel forbidding and grim, but that feeling of hostile elements shivering Thompson's timbers is something reassuring here.

He signs off with the cheery plod of We Roll, a hymn to his musical life on the open road. "Must be crazy but I'm doing it again, suitcase living since I don't know when," he sings, but *Ship To Shore* underlines that there's comfort to be had in familiar discomforts. It is steady and sturdy, watchfully buttoned-up, most of the messy emotional stuff happening a long way below the surface. Thompson's extraordinary, lyrical guitar playing squirts out in occasional Day-Glo flashes, but the magic remains in his ability to keep his little microcosmos tightly marshalled. Bleak midwinter 4 EVA; spring forever unsprung.

David Kaptein

BACK STORY: HEADWAY

● *Ship To Shore* was recorded in roughly a week in Woodstock, and features Thompson's established backing band – guitarist Bobby Eichorn, bassist Taras Prodaniuk, and drummer Michael Jerome – plus fiddle player David Mansfield and Thompson's wife Zara Phillips on backing vocals. Thompson told tradfolk.co that he already has the follow-up to *Ship To Shore* written. "I wrote this album and I wrote the next album. I'm so far ahead, I don't know what to do."


THE FEAR NEVER LEAVES YOU ALONE

Skipping along: Buffalo Tom (from left) Chris Colbourn, Bill Janovitz and Tom Maginnis, a band you can grow old with.

Buffalo Tom

★★★★

Jump Rope

SCRAWNY. CD/DL/LP

College rock evergreens' tenth album comes comfort-laden.

THOUGH THE alt-rock era was the rising tide that lifted their boat, Buffalo Tom always seemed more mature, more soulful than their grungy contemporaries. Like a weathered flannel shirt, their dog-eared, big-hearted college rock has only grown warmer and more comforting with the passing years, and their tenth album – their fourth since an unhurried but welcome reunion in 2007 – maintains their canny balance of bruising melancholy and triumphal hopefulness. The keening Come Closer is a highlight, Bill Janovitz howling into the void, tremolo guitar sighing behind him, piano heightening the heroics, while the Stones-y country ramble of Little Ghostmaker again proves bassist and occasional vocalist Chris Colbourn to be their secret weapon. In truth there's little here that wouldn't belong on the 1992 breakthrough *Let Me Come Over*, their enduring warm embrace marking Buffalo Tom as a band you can grow old with.

Stevie Chick

Amanda Bergman

★★★★

Your Hand Forever Checking On My Fever

GAMLESTANS GRAMMOFON. CD/DL/LP

Swedish singer time slips into the 1980s on her second album.

Somewhere between the release of her *Docks* debut in 2016 and now, Amanda Bergman (also of Swedish yacht rockers Amason) moved from orchestral indie folk manoeuvres into smooth '80s balladeering. The results land between Christine McVie's contributions to Fleetwood Mac's *Tango In The Night* and Rosie Vela's Steely Dan-assisted 1986 album *Zazu*, while Wild Geese Wild Love sounds like Kim Carnes' 1981 drivetime hit Bette Davis Eyes motoring through rural Sweden. The eight-year gap between albums involved a period of serious mental health issues for Bergman, followed by the death of her father. These experiences run through the songs – along with the challenges of motherhood in Day 2000 Awake and relationship schisms in the *Court And Spark*-like piano ballad Poor Symmetry – but ultimately never drag them down. Instead, a quietly entrancing atmosphere is sustained throughout.

Tom Doyle

The Decemberists

★★★

As It Ever Was, So It Will Be Again

YABB. CD/DL/LP

After six years, Portland's renaissance band return with a double album.

At the time of The Decemberists' 2018 LP *I'll Be Your Girl*, Donald Trump's America was weighing heavy on Colin Meloy and his band, resulting in a song called Everything Is Awful. There's not exactly been a glorious global turnaround since, but their ninth record proves their distinctive spirit is still unbroken. The mood is knowingly mordant – "Contract malaria/Meet at the burial ground," sings Meloy on the hand-whittled Sloop John B opening track, Burial Ground. America Made Me sets its jaunty fur cap at the protest song, while the clapboard-and-whalebone tavern-folk of William Fitzwilliam and Don't Go To The Woods tap into their Marie Celeste house-band tendencies. Mike Mills and The Shins' James Mercer guest, but the most attention-grabbing moment – or 19 minutes – is Joan In The Garden. Inspired by Joan Of Arc's angelic visions, it has fun clanking about the doom-rock/prog intersection, the sound of a band whose idiosyncrasies are happily undimmed.

Victoria Segal

Bernard Butler

★★★★

Good Grief

355. CD/DL/LP

First solo album in quarter of a century by former Suede guitarist and busy producer.

In the years since his second solo album, 1999's *Friends And Lovers*, Bernard Butler has concentrated on collaborating with such diverse artists as Duffy, Tricky, Mark Eitzel and The Libertines. *Good Grief* is the result of his slow return to the spotlight, its songs workshopped alone in a London rehearsal room and then aired at small acoustic gigs. The most surprising thing is how Butler's voice has dropped more than an octave, his formerly boyish croon taking on a sand-and-glue quality that is equal parts Nick Cave and Ian Hunter. The arrangements here are built from tasteful acoustic and electric guitars, adorned with violin, and in Camber Sands, a slow-building song about escape to an East Sussex beach, Mariachi horns. But it's the confessional aspect that makes this compelling stuff, whether relating mid-life disappointment in Living The Dream or detailing a life reset in the delicately chiming Clean.

Tom Doyle

Willie Nelson

★★★★

The Border

LEGACY RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

Willie's 75th solo album and 152nd overall.

Last year, in his nineties, country music's best advertisement for weed released two new albums, one all covers and one originals (*I Don't Know A Thing About Love*; *Bluegrass*). His latest, appearing a handful of days after his 91st birthday, offers 10 new songs – six covers, four originals. Willie co-wrote the latter with Buddy Cannon, his close collaborator and co-author this past decade or so. Fine producer too; Nelson, backed by a band of country pros, sounds in great shape. There are some upbeat moments (good ol' boy Made In Texas) but mostly it's on the slow side, a tempo in which Willie excels. Best of the new originals: nostalgic Once Upon A Yesterday. As for the covers, the out-and-out winner is Rodney Crowell for co-writing midtempo Many A Long And Lonesome Highway (with Will Jennings), but especially the brilliant title track (co-written with Allen Shamblin) which Nelson does proud.

Sylvie Simmons

Dana Gillespie

★★★★

First Love

FRETSORE. CD/LP

She sang with Bowie, now she's singing Jake Bugg on a covers LP packed with surprises.

She's 75, by her own account she has 74 albums to her name and she's certainly enjoyed an unashamedly colourful life, but Dana Gillespie is still capable of surprising. Here she's produced by Marc Almond, and aside from the rue-infused First Love Last Love, it's covers. Like Agnes Bernelle or late-period Marianne Faithfull, Gillespie talks more than sings these days. The arrangements are saccharine-free, but the braver the song choices, the better she is. She's magnificent on Green Day's Boulevard Of Broken Dreams; furious and sweary on Lana Del Rey's Gods & Monsters and she brings stately depth to Jake Bugg's Simple As This. Meanwhile, Not Dark Yet is the perfect Dylan song for her and this spine-tingling take is career highlight territory. It's not all perfect – In A Broken Dream and Fleetwood Mac's Dreams seem perfunctory – but this is a rare treat.

John Aizlewood

Bat For Lashes

★★★★

The Dream Of Delphi

MERCURY KX. CD/DL/LP

Baroque, beautiful motherwitchery pop.

Natasha Khan always embodies striking female archetypes in her work and for her sixth LP, recorded after the birth of her daughter Delphi in 2020, she creates the Motherwitch, a celestial parent protector. But despite the odd (comic) samples of croaking toad and dripping water, it's not just witchy woos. It's a raw, personal departure from the cinematic, almost studied feel of 2019's *Lost Girls*, exploring simultaneously the helpless love she feels for her daughter and the break-up of her relationship with the father. Khan creates a kind of mystic baroque that moves from the sparkling harp and deep, electronic breakbeats of the title track, to the drifting harmonium and vocal loops of The Midwives Have Left, and the tight, tense pain of Home. Khan's lyrics are like song poems – impressionist and vivid. This album is bravely beautiful, and one of her best.

Lucy O'Brien

When love comes to town: Richard Hawley – a true romantic who continues to enchant.

Dean Chalkley

Urban legend

Hawley's tenth takes its name from a Sheffield term of endearment. By James McNair.

Richard Hawley

★★★★

In This City They Call You Love

BMG. CD/DL/LP

IT'S A SIMPLE but seductive theory: the older the recording, the more magic locked within. Seemingly down with that notion, Richard Hawley has long repurposed the spirit of '50s and '60s balladry with style and great affection, his quiff, tailoring and fondness for the lonesome twang of a Gretsch guitar badges of nostalgic allegiance. Tapping influences from both sides of the Atlantic, and viewing the topography and humanity of his native Sheffield through the prism of yesteryear's special sauce, Hawley hit peak wide-screen wistfulness on 2005's *Coles Corner*. A true romantic then, but 2009's *Truelove's Gutter*, with its themes of loss and mourning, was sometimes black as the Kellingley colliery pit shaft; a sobering, if beautiful dose of social realism.

The question of just how long an artist should mine a particular seam is complex, but even although *In This City...* again hymns Sheffield, is again in thrall to sounds of a certain revered vintage, Hawley continues to enchant. Prism In Jeans, which his wife Helen rightly thinks is reminiscent of Jacky's pastiche-able gem par excellence White Horses, also has a lovely air of Elvis movie deep-cut about it, while People, Hawley's latest heartfelt nod to "this city of knives" and its steel production past, motors gently. All soft kick-drum groove and spare acoustic guitar, its meditative air evokes the quiet dignity of industrious working-class lives.

By now, the lush textures, exquisitely recorded vocals and sussed artisan guitar tones are a cinch for Hawley. He knows how to set the controls for the heart of Sun Records, but there's also a song here which journeys further, still. Deep Space, partly a critique of Elon Musk and Richard Branson's profligate, £1-million-a-ride space trips, is a pleasingly raucous departure which sees Hawley utilise a Poltava fuzz-wah pedal, as jointly built by Ukrainians and Russians.

Elsewhere, country ballad Hear That Lonesome Whistle Blow clearly owes something to Hawley and John Grant's 2023 shows doing Patsy Cline songs, and Heavy Rain, too, a song for absent friends, is a small masterpiece of mood-setting, subtle cinematic strings colouring its Nashville skyline right on cue.

Parochial Hawley's world often may be, but his themes are universal and timeless, and this is a vocation, you sense, not just a career. You might say he's doing for Sheffield what Bruce Springsteen has done for New Jersey, blue-collar solidarity, largesse and enduring mantras are important to him. "Have love/Give love/Get love", Hawley advises amid the hooky Tex-Mex groove of Have Love, while I'll Never Get Over You offers succour to anyone whoever ached, its wounded Elvis sensibilities a signpost to Disgracelands, Hawley's garden-shed home studio.

John Grant

★★★★

The Art Of The Lie

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

Atmospheric and funky sixth flits between the personal and the political.

John Grant's increasing dedication to synth-pop on his last few records has sometimes felt ill-fitting, like someone insisting on wearing a flashy shirt that doesn't suit them. Here, with the aid of latter-day Grace Jones producer Ivor Guest, his upbeat tendencies manifest in talk box-voiced electronic funk (think Roger Troutman/Zapp) that is more flattering, particularly when matched to the singer's biting wit on All That School ("for nothing") and the MAGA-bashing Meek AF. But *The Art Of The Lie* is very much an album of two opposing styles, with the other being glacial mood pieces primarily concerned with parentally-shaped nostalgia. The childlike Daddy is sparse then anthemic, Father sails along like *Moon Safari*-era Air and the muted Cocteau Twins atmosphere of Mother And Son is beautifully supported by Scottish folk singer Rachel Sermanni.

Tom Doyle

Cage The Elephant

★★★

Neon Pill

COLUMBIA. CD/DL/LP

Sixth album from Kentucky six-piece.

Times have been tough for Cage The Elephant singer Matthew Schultz since 2019's Grammy-winning *Social Cues*. He's married, divorced and married again (to the same woman), he's been arrested on firearms offences and, following the death of his (and chief songwriter Brad Schultz's) father, he suffered a breakdown and was hospitalised. As a result, there's catharsis in the shivering piano ballad Out Loud ("cocaine buzz and a caffeine high… man I really messed up") and even the upbeat title track is infused with regret. Yet, for all its reflection, *Neon Pill* offers real renewal. They're less rocky and in thrall to The Killers these days. In fact, they shake hips now, so the upbeat Hifi (True Light) and Ball & Chain echo (of all people), a more slinky Stereo MCs. An intriguing return.

John Aizlewood

Psychic Temple

★★★★

Doggie Paddlin' Thru The Cosmic Consciousness

BIG EGO. DL/LP

Long Beach cult leader ends his Temple era on a high.

Trying to simplify the eclectic underground career of Chris Schlarb this past decade is a bit of a mug's game, but broadly speaking his Psychic Temple records fall into two categories: expansive big band jazz workouts (riffing on Eno's *Music For Airports*, and Sabbath's Planet Caravan); or rich, mellow Cali-psych craftsmanship. This ninth and – Schlarb claims – final Psychic Temple album falls firmly into the second camp, with Schlarb as usual coordinating a large cast through nine warm and extremely well-finessed songs. Guitar don Chris Forsyth and his band add extra virtuosity to the sharp-dressed boogies When The Money Comes In and Lead Me To Your Lord. But it's the title track and Fields Of Grass/9 Is The End (It's Over) where Schlarb really shows his chops as an arranger – subtly layering electric sitar, Hammond and massed vocals – and singer-songwriter.

Imagine a mortally-voiced David Crosby, worried more about buying shoes for his kids than keeping his yacht, and you're close to the pleasures of this lovely, valedictory set.

John Mulvey

Various

★★★★

Long Distance Love: A Sweet Relief Tribute To Lowell George

FLATIRON RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

Double-album dive into the country-rock great.

Little Feat's Lowell George left a deep and rich legacy when he overdosed in 1979, one that deserves the kind of reverence accorded Gram Parsons, but is seldom given. Throughout the '70s the one-time Mother Of Invention flew the country-rock flag like no other, and gets a long overdue retrospective courtesy of this 25-track tribute. Ben Harper makes a fine fist of Roll Um Easy, Jonathan Wilson delivers a heartfelt Willin', and The Bird And The Bee (featuring his daughter Inara George) turn the rollicking Teenage Nervous Breakdown into quirky indie. But no one betters the opening three tracks where Mike Viola puts some extra chicken grease and grit into Trouble, Joachim Cooder smooths out Cold Cold Cold with a slinky New Orleans groove, and Elvis Costello gives it the 'full Alison' on Long Distance Love. The sometimes sweet, often irascible George would love it.

Andy Fyfe

Maya Hawke

★★★★

Chaos Angel

MOM + POP. CD/DL/LP

Third album from singer-songwriter-actor (and daughter of Ethan Hawke and Uma Thurman).

It's not clear whether Maya Hawke sees herself as actor or singer-songwriter, but three albums in, *Chaos Angel* is hardly the work of a dilettante. And, in the best sense, she ticks boxes. With a slightly kooky voice, the bravery to unconventionally strip things down (the acoustic Dark is propelled by drums), a winning way with a hook (Missing Out swings) and a turn of phrase which veers from acerbic ("She says 'I might be a genius'/Well, she could be a model…") to lovelorn ("I want you to come over/So I can lay in your lap"). And midway through, there's Not Now, Not Never, 78 seconds of a cappella fireworks. There are hints of First Aid Kit and Julie Byrne, but for all her accessibility, Hawke is too singular to be a copyist and too focused to be an amateur.

John Aizlewood

Nikka Costa

★★★★

Dirty Disco

KARTEL. CD/DL/LP

Former Prince and Sinatra collaborator heads for the dancefloor.

Success came early for the precociously talented Domenica 'Nikka' Costa, the Tokyo-born daughter of Sinatra arranger Don Costa. By the time she was nine, she had recorded a duet with Ol' Blue Eyes and performed with him on the White House lawn. She then became an unlikely juvenile pop star in Europe and Israel before reinventing herself as a blues and soul-influenced adult singer in the 2000s. The follow-up to 2017's ballad-focused *Underneath & In Between*, the contrary *Dirty Disco* is an enjoyable cache of slick dancefloor funk defined by sassy vocals, throbbing bass lines, robotic vocoders, squelchy synths, and jabbing horns. The set's brightest moments come in the shape of disco-funk nuggets like the anthemic It's Just Love and the Prince-channelling title cut. Noteworthy, too, are Slow Emotion, with its smouldering sensuality, and Keep It Up, a gloriously hedonistic romp. Dust down the glitter ball.

Charles Waring

The Zawose Queens

★★★★

Maisha

WORLD CIRCUIT. CD/DL/LP

Hypnotic grooves from the Gogo people of Tanzania.

DR HUKWE Zawose was a fixture at WOMAD events 30 years ago, wearing tribal gear and playing illimba (thumb piano) to psychedelic effect. The 1996 album *Chibite* is a narcotic delight yet, despite his heading a musical dynasty, it has taken 20 years for his family to take up the torch he carried. Showcasing Hukwe's daughter Pendo and granddaughter Leah, *Maisha* (their debut, and the first time they have written any songs), builds on the old man's legacy by digging deeper into their background while allowing British producers Oli Barton-Wood and Tom Excell to add further layers in the mix. To the expected rumble of drums (ngoma), fiddle (chizeze) and illimba come guitars and electronics, while bloodcurdling screams grab your attention and laughter and whistling lighten the mood. "This is our heritage," say the singers, "performed our way." Dad would be proud.

David Hutcheon

Illimba communication: Leah (left) and Pendo Zawose do it their way.

Michael Mbwambo

Trick of the light

Speedy follow-up to 2023's *Mercy* dazzles slowly. By Victoria Segal.

Pop visionary: John Cale sharpens the edges of his songs on his latest.

John Cale

★★★★

POPtical Illusion

DOMINO. CD/DL/LP

TAKE A trip down memory lane with John Cale, and it's unlikely to be a serene path, sheltered and shaded from any hint of a storm. With 2023's *Mercy*, he stared straight into the glare of his remarkable past, addressing his nocturnal New York rambles with David Bowie (Night Crawling), his relationship with Nico (Moonstruck, or the passage on Story Of Blood where he said Weyes Blood became a "dead ringer" for his "moonstruck junkie lady"), and a raft of less clearly defined phantoms. The results were implacably chilly, tethered to the present by his choice of younger collaborators – Natalie Mering, Animal Collective, Fat White Family – yet still hemmed in by ghosts.

Spectres still rise up on *POPtical Illusion* – Fear Is A Man's Best Friend rears its ugly head again on Edge Of Reason, Shark-Shark digs out its Sister Ray finery from the back of the wardrobe – but this record is more of a one-man show. Despite this, it somehow manages to sound less alone in the world than its crowded predecessor. "Make it happen for you in the future/It's a better life than in your past," Cale sings on Davies And Wales, the spring in its step evidence of his long-standing Brian Wilson fandom. If a song called I'm Angry suggests a return of his old hockey-masked mayhem, what actually emerges is a stately ice-melt drip of electric piano and self-analysis, the "shadow of decline" unable to dim the final image of someone "dancing in the light".

While the nebulous quality of *Mercy* was very much feature-not-bug, a cloudiness indicating the limits of memory, here Cale seems to have sharpened the edges of his songs, any mist or drift purely down to old-fashioned meandering. That's not to say *POPtical Illusion* isn't haunted – "there's someone whispering in my ear tonight" he sings on opening God Made Me Do It (Don't Ask Me Again), low, lonely synths and fever-dream backing vocals strongly implying there's no flesh-and-blood source for the voice he's hearing. Yet there's a brighter, crisper reckoning here, a sense of shucking off the visions, throwing open a few windows.

What's outside isn't always welcome – "the right-wingers burning their libraries down" on Company Commander's paranoid tangle of beats, or war-ready soldiers on Edge Of Reason – but he still stares it down. Funkball The Brewster has a similar submerged rage. "I've got nothing to say to you," he growls repeatedly over mangled *Kid A* keyboards, ending in a scream. As *POPtical Illusion* proves, however, Cale still has a great deal to say, even if the meaning bends and bows depending on where you stand. He's still fascinated by the challenges of reconciling himself to the past, to the present, to the turbulent people around him. As he sings on Calling You Out: "there's always time for change, my friend." Work, wonderfully, is still in progress.

Beings

★★★★

There Is A Garden

NO QUARTER. CD/DL/LP

A new band of familiar ringers revels in anything-goes camaraderie.

Scope the line-up of this quartet, and you may assume such an esteemed coalition – Shahzad Ismaily, Steve Gunn, Zoh Amba, Jim White – works only for deep heads, those willing to join a wild journey into woolly improvisation. Collectively, after all, these four connect to nearly every recess of the American experimental universe. Consider Small Vows, then, a disarming preamble for a joyous half-hour, as White and Ismaily swing slowly beneath Amba's roller-coaster sax and Gunn's languid riff. This is the wondrous last gasp of some all-night soirée. They refuse self-definition, leaping from the Magik Markers-like psych-folk of Flowers That Talk to the pulverised-and-pounded spirit march of Face Of Silence. Happy To Be conjures the internal explorations of Alabaster DePlume, while In The Garden splashes out in 64 seconds of playful chaos. It's a rare delight to hear a band so accomplished take what it does seriously, without taking itself that way.

Grayson Haver Currin

Ian Lynch

★★★

All You Need Is Death

INVADA. DL/LP

Lankum co-leader's soundtrack to Paul Duane's "cosmic folk horror" movie.

Fronting Dublin's Celtic folk radicals alongside Radie Peat, Lynch must've been top of Duane's wishlist to score his debut picture, set in "a murky timeless space" which simultaneously evokes both pre-Christian and post-millennial Ireland – one might say the same of last year's spellbinding *False Lankum*. The director won't have been disappointed with this resultant soundtrack, which reprises the hit album's ancient songcraft and droning menace, with heightened atmospherics and screaming added for scarifying cinematic effect. Lynch deployed traditional instruments in unusual ways "to suggest something primal and chthonic", and, amongst others, Máirseáil Chrapchosach's scraping violins and inexorably dragging chain-gang rhythm fully achieve that aim. A New Dawn, An Old Song's caveman growling perhaps borders on comedy when home-listening, but Old God Rising's blend of moaning accordion and tremulous ancient voice is stirringly effective. A further rendition (for the title credits?) resembles Norwegian black metallers Mayhem: Lankum's next outing should be interesting.

Andrew Perry

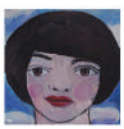
Bonny Light Horseman

★★★★

Keep Me On Your Mind/See You Free

JAGJAGUWAR. CD/DL/LP

Sprawling third album from occasional US folk rock trio.



There's a lot to wrap your head around on Bonny Light Horseman's third album, both figuratively and physically. As the double-barrelled title suggests, this is a double album, weighing in at a hefty 20 songs exploring life's mistakes and missteps, but filled with love and joyfulness at the pleasure those rough edges can provide. With the sparring vocals of singers Anaïs Mitchell and Eric D Johnson at the centre of everything, and the music softly anchored by the old piano in the County Cork pub where the album was mostly recorded, the songs spiral in and out, creating a dreamy ambience that seems to go on forever, but in a good way. Artistically, Bonny Light Horseman probably could've said just as much over half the tracks, but the fact they had the courage to keep digging ever deeper into their emotional turbulence has borne spectacular results.

Andy Fyfe

Small Town Jones

★★★★

Kintsugi

BROKEN SEA. CD/DL/LP

Third album from north Devon singer-songwriter.

Known by his wife and kids as Jim, Small Town Jones has quietly released three previous albums of profoundly sincere, vaguely Americana-flavoured indie over the past decade. *Kintsugi* – named for the Japanese art of soldering broken pottery back together with gold – is his first not to feature Peter Bruntnell as producer and collaborator, Jones instead conscripting old college friend Mike Reed for the same role (Reed wrote the soundtrack for TV show Ted Lasso). Along with ever-present guitarist Dave Little, *Kintsugi* surges and dips along life's broken path, some of it mended, some still with safety barriers around giant sinkholes. Opening track Better Days starts with enormous hope for the future, but Jones's trademark self-doubt hits a peak with the atmospheric, drifting Castaway. As Jones points out, there can be enormous beauty in broken things, and *Kintsugi* is a perfect example of that philosophy.

Andy Fyfe

Madeline McManus

Richard Russell and Samantha Morton: no easy ride.

Roots revival

Actor and producer unite for a haunting excavation of the past. By Victoria Segal.

Sam Morton

★★★★

Daffodils & Dirt

XL. CD/DL/LP

WHETHER IT'S natural suspicion of mission creep, the fear of tattooed Hollywood A-listers fulfilling boorish rock fantasies, or the in-time-for-Christmas trail of celebrity blues albums, it's hard not to flinch when actors announce a pivot into music. It only takes a moment of *Daffodils & Dirt*'s uncanny thrum, however, to realise that Sam Morton is no oxygen-stealing vanity project. A collaboration between producer Richard Russell and actor Samantha Morton – they take the Alice Cooper approach to band-naming – *Daffodils & Dirt* rakes through time and memory, a disturbing but often beautiful collage of past and present, fantasy and reality.

The pair met after Russell heard Morton's Desert Island Discs (Spiritualized, Suicide, Einstürzende Neubauten) and, impressed by her love for Molly Drake's I Remember, contacted her through Aphex Twin video director Chris Cunningham – a sequence that hints at this record's atmospheric checkpoints. While the co-songwriters resist describing *Daffodils & Dirt* as pure memoir, Morton's childhood in the care system – sometimes in Nottingham's children's homes or foster families, sometimes on the streets – is its core material. The song titles sound like ominous addresses – Hungerhill Road, Highwood House, Greenstone – or in the case of Purple Yellow, like bruises; places that Morton and Russell press until they hurt.

In spirit if not substance, it resonates with Kim Gordon's solo albums, the sense of psychic unease being pressed straight onto tape. Morton switches between hushed spoken word, Turn Of The Screw nursery-rhyming and, on Cry Without End, sweet It's A Fine Day clarity. Portishead and Tricky echo through Hungerhill Road ("Ghostbusters sky/The smell of piss"), while The Shadow, mainly floorboard creak and *White Chalk* dust, veils trauma in fairy-tale. On Purple Yellow, Morton's tender, terrifying reckoning with family, Russell builds tension around a sample of her breath, its fragility at odds with the danger around: "Swallowing the night air/Fizzing of the nightmare/Eyes of the beast stare."

Any hope is fittingly filtered through musical memories – the rave pulse of Double Dip Neon, or the ghost of Unchained Melody haunting Loved By God. "In one of the children's homes I lived in, we used to riot," says Morton on Broxtowe Girl, describing barricade-building while listening to UB40's *Labour Of Love II* – "little kids made to feel alive by the music." When Ali Campbell arrives to sing "it's gonna be all right," it's deeply moving.

It is a lot: the cover of Johnnie Ray's The Little White Cloud That Cried has a viscous, hyperpop sheen that's almost too good at inducing queasy alienation. Yet Morton and Russell rarely overplay their emotional hand, the music colour-changing to match the narrative of damage and resilience. "There's something in here that just clicks," says Morton on Loved By God; once it locks in, *Daffodils & Dirt* is hard to shake off.

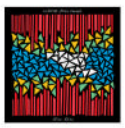
Rich Ruth

★★★★

Water Still Flows

THIRD MAN. CD/DL/LP/MC

The Tennessee sideman takes Music City to hell, then heaven.



Is there any feeling or form the sprawl of kosmische cannot contain? On his third album, Nashville guitarist and composer Michael Ruth argues no. These seven lush, multivalent pieces proclaim he's right. Ruth folds harp, pedal steel, sax, a monstrous rhythm section, and a panoply of electronics into these microcosms, which move together like a solar system despite profound differences. Where opener Action At A Distance invokes the dirt-dancefloor theme for some jam-band convocation, its successor, Crying In The Trees, sprinkles New Age fairy dust across the blackened soundscapes of Sunn O))). If both Blue Shell and Somewhere In Time offer final drifts into the cosmos, respectively propelled by infinite sequencers and fretless bass, the escape arrives after Aspiring To The Sky has ground itself down with a howling mix of metal and jazz. Even that, much like this expansive record, delivers a cleansing amid tense times.

Grayson Haver Currin

Anton Corbijn

Big Special

★★★★

Postindustrial Hometown Blues

SO RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

Black Country rock, punk, hip-hop, rants, and the rest from dynamic duo.

At various points on this 15-track debut there are distinct echoes of Iggy Pop, The Streets, The White Stripes and Sleaford Mods. Yet, Big Special – frontman Joe Hicklin and drummer Callum Moloney – emerge with a unique character on a record that sometimes seems fit to burst with ideas. One minute, I Mock Joggers sounds like the Mods in cahoots with The Black Keys, the next This Here Ain't Water offers oversaturated heavy blues with Hicklin affectingly wailing its sterling hookline. My Shape (Blocking The Light) features disturbed dream pop, while in Black Dog/White Horse the singer comes over like a troubled Lee Hazlewood ("My pills make me thirsty/The shape of my intention's not the shape that I'm in"). It could be a stylistic mess, but instead it's an entirely cohesive record, brimming with energy, invention, humour, lived experience, nifty playing and earwormy melodies: all the things that make up a great debut album.

Tom Doyle

La Luz

★★★★

News Of The Universe

SUB POP. CD/DL/LP

The fifth studio album from American neo-psych acolytes.

The comic book-esque cover depicts an avatar of La Luz's lead singer and guitarist Shana Cleveland seemingly watching herself explode. Composed in the aftermath of breast cancer treatment, the album marks the shift from hazy Americana to more adventurous territory, taking in psychedelia, art rock and Krautrock with familiar yet unexpected references: Good Luck With Your Secret moves at the somnambulistic pace of Broadcast's Come On Let's Go, while Blue Moth Cloud Shadow suggests a retro-futuristic setting of Pink Floyd's Any Colour You Like. The overall spell is occasionally interrupted by incongruous production, such as bubbling arpeggios at the end of the otherwise fantastic Strange World. With its captivating melodies and sci-fi charm, *News Of The Universe* is as poignant as it is hopeful. By acknowledging the fragility of life, this personal agenda-setting album makes a bold statement.

Irina Shtreis

King Hannah

★★★★

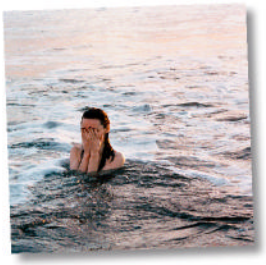
Big Swimmer

CITY SLANG. CD/DL/LP

Second album from the Liverpudlian Low.

Unusually for 21st-century Brits, King Hannah duo Hannah Merrick and Craig Whittle's 2021 debut *I'm Not Sorry, I Was Just Being Me* revived the art of slowcore; the blissful, molten, song-based kind associated with Galaxie 500 and Mazzy Star, buzzing with guitar solos. One convert was Sharon Van Etten; her guest vocal on *Big Swimmer*'s title track softly entwines around Merrick's cool, smoky tones before Whittle's guitar rides out on a dust storm. *Big Swimmer* also benefits from being tour-toughened by spells supporting Thurston Moore and Kurt Vile around America; lyrically, it's Merrick's diary of their delirious reaction to that vast continent, such as the sublime desolation of Somewhere Near El Paso, bathed in "a half-lit Denny's sign", or Lily Pad, where Merrick, sounding almost horizontal, croons, "I feel like I'm on the front cover of that Slint album/The one with all four of them on/Just floating along."

Martin Aston



Ann Savoy

★★★★

Another Heart

SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

First official solo album from veteran Cajun singer and music historian.

Since her first albums on Arhoolie Records in the '80s, Savoy's been known as an expert on Cajun music, singing in French Creole in The Magnolia Sisters, Savoy-Doucet Cajun Band and, more recently, The Savoy Family Band. Her greatest acclaim came with *Adieu False Heart* (2006), her Grammy-nominated album of duets with Linda Ronstadt, but plans for a follow-up were thwarted by Ronstadt's illness and retirement. The 11 songs here are a mix of originals and covers – an interesting selection ranging from folk (Sandy Denny; Joni Mitchell) to rock (Kinks; Springsteen). Some are sung in French (best: a lovely Triste Samedi), but most are in English (old-timey Something's Got A Hold On Me), and backed by a fine band that includes Rhiannon Giddens on one song. Best on the ballads, Savoy's take on Springsteen's Stolen Car (featuring Giddens' harmony vocal) is a highlight.

Sylvie Simmons

Prince Fatty

★★★★

Artikal Intelligence

LOVEDUB LIMITED. DL/LP

More entertaining reggae mash-ups from Fatty & Friends.

Prince Fatty carved his niche on the British reggae scene by revamping old favourites in a home studio packed with vintage gear, and *Artikal Intelligence* expands the palette: Omar fronts an understated cover of Roy Ayers' Everybody Loves The Sunshine, while talented singer Shniece tackles Jefferson Airplane's White Rabbit and Janis Joplin's Mercedes Benz, the latter with a Roots Radics bass line. There are phased horns on a tasteful update of Marcia Griffiths' Tell Me Now, sung by Griffiths herself, and Big Youth blasts cybercrime on an update of Winston Francis's Studio One gem, Let's Go To Zion. Earl 16's adaptation of Carlton Livingston's 100 Weight Of Collie Weed gets a toasting boost from deejay Horseman, and there's a playful reggae take of Smoke City's trip-hop hit Underwater Love, featuring original vocalist Nina Miranda. All yielding a dubwise, spirited LP that's never po-faced.

David Katz

Andrew Bird Trio

★★★★

Sunday Morning Put-On

LOMA VISTA RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

Genre-spanning singer/violinist's pared down take on '30s/'40s vocal jazz.

With a title that reads like a listening instruction, Andrew Bird's homage to the jazz he discovered in his twenties in Chicago, taps into a single, sustained mood. Conjuring suitably smoky, basement bar vibes alongside bassist Alan Hampton and drummer Ted Poor, Bird escorts well-worn standards down unexpected alleyways. Be it a moonlit version of Rodgers & Hart's I Didn't Know What Time It Was, a lonesome take on Duke Ellington's Caravan, a chamber-jazz spin on tango Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise or closing nine-minute instrumental Ballon de Peut-Etre, it's riven with intriguing oppositions. Rendered with a relaxed touch, there's a spaciousness that allows guitarist Jeff Parker's minimalist interjections and the intimate textures of Bird's bowed and plucked violin, whistle solos and easy-going voice to truly resonate.

Andy Cowan

Karolina Wieloch, Fletcher Moor

Mojo's working: Little Feat bathe in the blues.

Little Feat

★★★★

Sam's Place

HOT TOMATO PRODUCTIONS/MRI. CD/DL/LP

The Feat play the blues on first studio LP for 12 years.

Little Feat have been steeped in the blues for their half-century history, but with the exception of a tribute to mentor Howlin' Wolf and their irreverent A Apolitical Blues, they've steered away from playing straight 12-bar tunes. With percussionist Sam Clayton growling the vocals here, they bathe in the blues, immersed in classics by masters Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon and Little Walter. Highlights include Louisiana swamp popster Bobby Charles's Why People Like That and live closer Got My Mojo Working. Slide guitarist Scott Sharrard is phenomenal, slithering lizard-like all over the neck. Keyboardist and Feat co-founder Bill Payne keeps a gritty organ pumping, as well as the actual piano Jerry Lee Lewis pounded aeons ago. Top drawer guests include Bonnie Raitt's thrilling trilling on Muddy's Long Distance Call and mouth harpist Bull LoBue.

Michael Simmons

Eels

★★★★

Eels Time!

E WORKS/PIAS. CD/DL/LP

Near-death experience colours and inspires E's fifteenth LP.

The clavicle-to-belly scar left by Mark Oliver Everett AKA E's recent open heart surgery features in his latest promo pic, and his self-penned album bio names and thanks the medical staff who saved him. Unsurprising, then, that *Eels Time!* counts blessings and years remaining. "It's a bummer/But it's still summer," reflects glass half-full closer Let's Be Lucky, while vulnerable, wistful opener Time finds E afraid to open the door lest the Reaper has knocked. Sandpaper-voice intact, distressed beats still go on Goldy, our host has by now taken too many bullets to fully fake the insouciance of that titular exclamation mark, but with childhood friend Sean Coleman aboard to coax Brian Wilson-ness from the 1980s'-penned And You Run, and tunes as charming as breezy Sweet Smile, let's be grateful that *Eels Time!* rolls on.

James McNair

JAZZ

BY ANDY COWAN

Jake Long

★★★★

City Swamp

NEW SOIL. CD/DL/LP

Maisha drummer/composer's dystopian jazz suite harks back to electric-era Miles Davis.

Reassembled from extended improvisations with a clutch of top-drawer UK instrumentalists, the four winding tracks here move beyond the spiritual jazz Long's band Maisha are bracketed with. Billed as a meditation on London's regeneration, there's a compelling beauty to opener Ideological Rubble as rippling keys and percussive clatters ride an indomitable bluesy groove, before a tender breakdown shifts the direction of travel. While Binker Golding and Nubya Garcia play with artful restraint amid Celestial Soup's abstractions, the many-splendored Silhouette and slow-building Swamp are funky from the off, pulses like ticking bombs as small motifs slowly move into focus, guitarist Shirley Tetteh in captivating form. *City Swamp* taps unashamedly into '70s fusion, but there's nothing retro about Long's richly textured, expansive compositions.

ALSO RELEASED

Finn Rees

★★★★

Dawn Is A Melody

MR BONGO. DL/LP

Finn Rees has an old soul. Inspired by Tasmania's landscapes, the debut from the keyboard half of Melbourne rare groove duo Close Counters is an exercise in bright-eyed spiritual jazz. Fans of Alice Coltrane and Arthur Verocai will find succour in his ancient/modern arrangements, as Siwei Wong's rippling harps and Cheryl Durongpisitkul's earthy tenor sax enhance winding standouts Lagoon and Expansion.

Malcolm Jiyane Tree-O

★★★★

True Story

MUSHROOM HOUR/NEW SOIL. CD/DL/LP

A continuation of the highly personal voice this singer/trombonist brought to 2021 debut *Umdali*, *True Story* is deeply rooted in South Africa's dancing rhythms. While highlights MaBrrrrrrrrr and Peter's Torch portray a homely soulfulness via vamping keys, down-tempo refrains, poised solos and yearning melodies, it's hard to remain unmoved by Jiyane's plaintive vocal interplay with Nosisi Ngakane, Dumama and Siya Makuzeni.

Fay Victor

★★★★

Life Is Funny That Way

TAO FORMS. CD/DL/LP

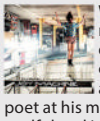
A decade after she began incorporating pianist Herbie Nichols' music into her repertoire, Victor adds original lyrics to her poignant covers, the minimalism of the set-up (including saxophonist Michael Attias and pianist Anthony Coleman) highlighting her versatile voice. An avant-garde Nina Simone with the performative punch of Betty Carter, Victor's unabashed acrobatics mesmerise on Descent Into Madness and an updated Lady Sings The Blues.

Dizraeli

★★★★

Joy Machine

DEF PRESSÉ. DL/LP



Written and recorded in a day, *Joy Machine* captures the award-winning poet at his most animated, soulful and incisive, with backing from top UK musicians including Ronan Perrett, Jonathan Enser and Alabaster DePlume. Whether narrating a heart-breaking ode to a lost sister (Abigail), battling life's slings and arrows (Wild Animus) or examining historical slavery via war-torn poetics (I See Ghosts) it hits every mark. *AC*

Music has the right to their children: (from left) Salsburg, Billy and Trotter.

Doing it for the kids

Hardcore lullabies from the Louisville all-stars. By John Mulvey.

Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, Nathan Salsburg, Tyler Trotter

★★★★

Hear The Children Sing & The Evidence

NO QUARTER. CD/DL/LP

WHEN WE sing to our children, are we trying to soothe them towards sleep, or embedding our excellent musical taste in their minds? Maybe a bit of both, as the creative parent can make a workable lullaby out of the unlikeliest source material. Take Nathan Salsburg, the Louisville guitarist and folklorist, who as a new father would sit in a rocking chair with his guitar held in one arm and his infant daughter Talya in another. His favoured song was, of all things, The Evidence by Lungfish, a gnarly band from Baltimore whose music from the 1990s and early 2000s could usefully be described as shamanic post-hardcore. The Evidence first appeared on Lungfish's fourth album, *Pass And Stow* (1994), close to a tune not obviously aimed at kids called In Praise Of Amoral Phenomena.

Daniel Higgs, the frontman of Lungfish, has the demeanour of a cult leader and tends to sing as if he's casting a spell. It's an imperative adopted here by Salsburg's neighbour Will 'Bonnie "Prince" Billy' Oldham, as he magnifies the incantatory power of The Evidence by stretching it on and on for 21 minutes. Salsburg plays guitar. Tyler Trotter – another Louisville resident, from the Slint-affiliated band Watter – adds drum machines and synths. Then they take another Lungfish song, 2003's Hear The Children Sing, and make that one last another 20 minutes. It ends with Talya Salsburg and Oldham's daughter Poppy joining in on the refrain: "Oh the devil is a flower/Plucked from a cloud."

Weird record, then, even by the sometimes esoteric standards of Salsburg and Oldham. But one of the many magical things about *Hear The Children Sing & The Evidence* is how underground punk can be alchemised by two musicians usually associated with folk traditions, and transformed into a mantric sound much harder to categorise. As he gets older and his voice becomes ever more controlled and nuanced, Oldham is rather good at this sort of thing; the key antecedent is probably *Epic Jammers And Fortunate Little Ditties*, his 2016 album with Chicagoan New Age synthesists Bitchin Bajas, where his lyrics were constructed entirely from the messages contained in fortune cookies. Salsburg, meanwhile, has been investigating the hypnotic potential of his music on his *Landwerks* series of releases, where he loops samples from his extensive 78s collection and plays along to them on electric guitar. Hear The Children Sing, in particular, sounds like a gorgeous extrapolation of that strategy, with Salsburg's guitar lines rippling around a banjo played by another Watter member, Zak Riles.

The steady repetitions, the tiny incremental shifts, the generally enchanted air that pervades all 41 minutes of *Hear The Children Sing & The Evidence*, can lull adults as well as children into a fugue state. But there's a lot to learn from it, too: how strange, niche music can charm unexpected audiences; how Oldham and Salsburg can continue to evolve and surprise in their work; how families can make lasting bonds over songs that transcend obvious meaning. The Evidence and Hear The Children Sing are probably lodged in Talya Salsburg and Poppy Oldham's subconsciouses for life now. Give this beautiful record of uncanny domesticity a few listens, and they may well take up residence in yours, too.

Aron Conaway

Afterlands

★★★★

We Are The Animals In The Night

LOST MAP. CD/DL/LP

Gauzy atmospheres from The Phantom Band's Rick Anthony and soundtrack composer David McAulay.

With Glasgow's The Phantom Band still on a long hiatus after all of their equipment, roughly £13,000's worth, was stolen from their van following a 2015 gig in Lille, singer Rick Anthony has pursued his parallel solo career under the name Rick Redbeard, but quietly strikes gold here as Afterlands alongside former studio engineer McAulay. The emphasis is on hushed power – Anthony could be a folk-informed Paul Buchanan of The Blue Nile on I Woke To The Sound Of The Wind, while the ambient washes of Bones Of The Earth would have fitted onto any This Mortal Coil album. The standout moments are two duets with Jill Lorean (ex-Sparrow And The Workshop), particularly Whale Song, where the two sound like a starry-eyed Emmylou and Gram as produced by Angelo Badalamenti. Altogether, it's a beautiful, gently mesmerising album.

Tom Doyle

Crowded House

★★★★

Gravity Stairs

BMG. CD/DL/LP

Crowded House finally do Crowded House again.

The three occasional albums that have followed since Crowded House's 1996 split have been ad hoc affairs, mostly comprising songs written for other Neil Finn projects that he felt somehow aligned more with his old band. This second album by the latest line-up (his sons Liam and Elroy, founding bass player Nick Seymour, and one-time producer Mitchell Froom on keyboards), however, started and finished as pure Crowded House. While last album *Dreamers Are Waiting* had flashes of the old days, *Gravity Stairs* tracks such as Teenage Summer, Oh Hi and particularly All That I Can Ever Own and The Howl effortlessly withstand direct comparison with the band's mid-'90s peak. OK, there may not be anything quite like 1993's near-perfect Distant Sun – few songs by anyone are – but *Gravity Stairs* is the most Crowded House thing that Crowded House have made in 30 years.

Andy Fyfe

Martha Rose

★★★★

Close To Close

MANSIONS & MILLIONS. DL/LP

Berlin-based musician's third album of 21st-century dream pop (pronounced 'close' as in nearby).

A Berliner since 2013, Camberwell's Martha Rose has turned herself into a German underground staple with her breathy, multi-layered, English-speaking, Casio-utilising, cutting-edge dreampop. Operating in a similarly subtle ballpark to Kate Havnevik and Imogen Heap, she casts her net wide on her third album, so there's an Eastern undertow to Never Love Enough, while Eurydice (titled after the wife of Orpheus who remained resistant to the resurrective powers of music) updates Greek mythology. Elsewhere, Bleu cites the film Three Colours: Blue and declares glumly "the only way out is to eat another ice cream – with espresso – and give up everything". Her worldview isn't always so bleak: Chin Up isn't titled in irony, and Reflective Hands is irresistibly hooky, but there is keen intelligence afoot and the sense that Berlin may, one none-too-distant-day, be too small for her.

John Aizlewood

Peter Bibby

★★★

Drama King

SPINNING TOP. DL/LP

Australian rocker's fourth LP takes the road to sobriety.

"No one seems to want to come and talk to me/'Cos I'm the arsehole, probably…" Setting the tone with The Arsehole, *Drama King* is a terrifically entertaining, profanity-laced and often mortifying litany of confrontations, party-hard messiness and self-immolation (its author finally got sober in 2023). Bibby takes the same who-gives-a-fuck approach as Amyl And The Sniffers, though his raunch is closer to pub rock than punk, with a nod to Dylan's wild mercury sound, as Bibby hollers and sneers like Chris Bailey or Wreckless Eric. Flat-out rocker Fun Guy distils *Drama King*'s message: "I used to get drunk to let off the steam/And I'd transform into a vomit machine/Oh the shame, remorse, and pain." Downbeat ballads Bin Boy and Terracotta Brick sound like he's even sorry for the damage he's wreaked.

Martin Aston

Black Country Communion

★★★

V

J&R ADVENTURES/MASCOT. CD/DL/LP

UK/US hard-rock hybrid release their first LP in seven years.

A supergroup BCC may be, but it's 'Voice Of Rock' Glenn Hughes (Deep Purple; Trapeze) who's the true *Übermensch* here, his sheer power and range putting a smile on your face as he nears 73. Not that John Bonham's son Jason, blues guitar virtuoso Joe Bonamassa and Hammond/clavinet man Derek Sherinian are any slouches, of course, but with Hughes leading the charge on the Zeppelin circa Trampled Underfoot-like Stay Free, BCC are Godzilla and Tokyo will get crushed. All of these men are fairly thinly-spread across other projects (Bonham, for example, also drums with Sammy Hagar And The Circle), but if there's occasionally a slight 'let's knock another one out' vibe (Skyway), producer Kevin Shirley's work at Hollywood's Sunset Sound, energised funk closer The Open Road, and Bonamassa's searing solo on Love And Faith all ensure *V* soars.

James McNair

Joana Serrat

★★★★

Big Wave

GREAT CANYON. CD/DL/LP

Catalonian's forceful sixth album. Midlake and Mercury Rev alumni assist.

After five albums mining a sweet spot between Stevie Nicks and Kim Deal, Serrat cites the death of her grandparents as the trigger point for this album's sea change, adding aggressive distortion to her dream-pop ideal, as if My Bloody Valentine and early Cocteau Twins have seeped through the cracks. A bass Moog occasionally adds heavy bottom end to the gusts of guitar, through which Serrat's still-dreamy vocal emerges, like sun breaking through storm clouds. Two calmer settings – Are You Still Here and A Dream That Can Last – are the clearest signs of familial loss, but ample evidence suggests *Big Wave* documents more widespread trauma, from "You erased my soul" (The Cord) to "This house is haunted and it kills" (The House). Easily Serrat's finest hour.

Martin Aston

Arooj Aftab

★★★★

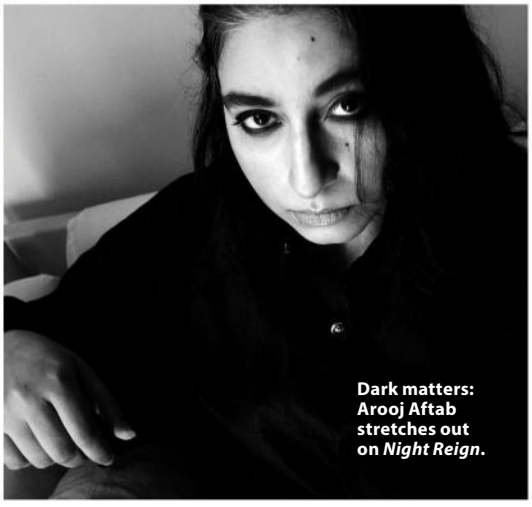
Night Reign

VERVE. CD/DL/LP

Nocturnal flame: fifth album from Brooklyn-based musician sticks to the wee small hours.

The hours of darkness are the correct backdrop for the confessions and revelations that spill from Arooj Aftab's music, whether the excitement of a party, its emotional aftermath or the anxieties that flood in when daylight's logic runs out. Following 2021's grief-steeped *Vulture Prince* and 2023's *Love In Exile*, her collaboration with pianist Vijay Iyer and multi-instrumentalist Shahzad Ismaily, *Night Reign* is the sound of Aftab pulling at new strings, stretching out to full extent – and not just because of the provocative autotune on the blossomy Raat Ki Rani. Recontextualised Urdu poetry (Na Gul, arranged with a Jim O'Rourke glimmer) unfolds alongside American jazz standards (a beatnik shimmy through Autumn Leaves) and a velvety reworking of *Vulture Prince*'s Last Night, while Bolo Na features astringent, fretful contributions from Moor Mother. Dizzied, delirious, conflicted, *Night Reign* draws in tight around you.

Victoria Segal



Dark matters: Arooj Aftab stretches out on *Night Reign*.

Dave Alvin And Jimmie Dale Gilmore

★★★★

TexiCali

YEP ROC. CD/DL/LP

Blaster and Flatlander come back for a second round.

Six years ago, after their collaborative US tour, Alvin and Gilmore went into the studio emerging with *Downey To Lubbock*. Named for their respective hometowns in California and Texas, it was one of the best Americana albums that year. Though born and raised a decade in years and a thousand miles apart, roots rocker Alvin and country singer Gilmore seemed symbiotic when it came to music. Same with the 11 songs on this album, like Blind Willie McTell's Broke Down Engine, or Brownie McGhee's Betty And Dupree. There are originals too, best being Alvin's slow, lovely Death Of The Last Stripper (co-written with Terry and Jo Harvey Allen) and Blind Owl, his tribute to Alan Wilson of Canned Heat. That on-the-road-again feeling is all over the album, with a well-honed band that plays like they still get a kick from it. As Gilmore sings in the closing track: "We're still standing."

Sylvie Simmons

Strand Of Oaks

★★★

Miracle Focus

WESTERN VINYL. CD/DL/LP

Tim Showalter is back, but not as we knew him.

Ever in flux, always reaching for self-actualisation, Tim Showalter, AKA Strand Of Oaks, has really shaken things up since 2021's *In Heaven*. Taking up painting and playing crooked biker Hoosier in FX TV's Mayans MC impacted positively, but more catalysing still was Showalter's new-found meditation practice, a portal to him embracing joy, gratitude and universal connectedness via this fizzing, nostalgic synth-anthems LP, influenced by Alice Coltrane, the writings of Ram Dass, and, to these ears, Harold Faltermeyer (see Navigator). Party At Monster Lake, bedding down somewhere between Flaming Lips and Nirvana unplugged, sees him grab a guitar again, but elsewhere it's vocoders, mantras, string-pad whooshes and epic precipices. Easy to be cynical about *Miracle Focus*'s natural-high alternative to Showalter's lysergic past, perhaps, but spacey, transcendent opener More You finds him in a wondrous, enviably alive place.

James McNair

FOLK

BY JIM WIRTH

Angeline, Cohen And Jon

★★★★

Grace Will Lead Me Home

INVISIBLE FOLK. CD/DL/LP

A three-handed voyage to Amazing Grace-land.

Adopted as an African-American spiritual, Amazing Grace has a troublesome backstory: written in 1772, its author John Newton was a parish priest in Olney, Buckinghamshire, but also an ex-slave ship captain. With echoes of Peter Bellamy's ballad opera The Transports, this thoughtful project finds *Sorrow Songs* auteur Angeline Morrison, concertina maestro Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne and Jon Bickley wrestling with Amazing Grace's roots while honouring its message of redemption. Morrison gets inside Newton's process on the Rusholme Ruffians-alike Turn Round Newton and whips out a glorious autoharp-accompanied take of Zoe Mulford's The President Sang Amazing Grace, while Braithwaite-Kilcoyne's Fantasia On A West Indian Burial Theme is nobly elegiac. Bickley's gruff Sorry, meanwhile, posits that any reckoning with the legacy of slavery can only begin with a proper apology. That Newton came out as an abolitionist in 1788, his seafaring past "a subject of humiliating reflection", is a moot point, but the sounds here are sweet indeed.

ALSO RELEASED

Ben Nicholls

★★★★

Duets

HUDSON. CD/DL

Your modern-day Danny Thompson, double-bassist Ben Nicholls lured in an all-star cast to accompany him on this set of trad-arrs and modern faves. Nadine Shah sinks her teeth into Cuckoo, Martin Simpson delivers a cheery Flash Company, Patsy Reid fiddles a storm around Tibby Fowler, and Kris Drever waves goodbye to dry land on The Greenland Whale Fisheries. A deeply classy selection; take a bow, that man.

Landless

★★★★

Lúireach

GLITTERBEAT. CD/DL/LP

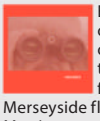
Comprised of Lily Power, Méabh Meir, Ruth Clinton and Sinéad Lynch, Dublin's Landless are a four-part harmony group who – on their second LP – come across like Macbeth's Weird Sisters crashing a Sandy Denny séance. Lankum's Cormac MacDiarmada guests as trad tunes get a *Marble Index* makeover: The Grey Selkie Of Sule Skerry and The Wounded Hussar in particular could stun a bat at 30 paces. Unearthly.

Laura J Martin

★★★★

Prepared

SUMMER CRITICS. CD/DL/LP



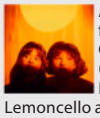
Enya poised one-legged on top of a holy mountain, the slow-cooked fourth LP from Merseyside flute maven Laura J Martin weaves New Age moods and Eno-esque fourth-world folk into a gnomic mid-life rhapsody. A sideline from her new day job repairing woodwind instruments, *Prepared* maps a magical hinterland between crimpers-aloft Strawberry Switchblade and Robbie Basho therapy music. Be healed.

Lemoncello

★★★★

Lemoncello

CLADDAGH. CD/DL/LP



Another winner from the revived Claddagh label (see the ØXN and Niamh Bury LPs), Lemoncello are Laura Quirke and Claire Kinsella, with their debut offering a bookish mix of Gen-Z smarts (Dopamine), woozy strings (All The Good Men) and trad harmonies. Shades of the McGarrigles or Lisa O'Neill here, a flash of Stevie Nicks crushed velvet there, and a mesmeric Lagan Love to fade. Swipe right. *JW*

Myriam Gendron

★★★★

Mayday

FEEDING TUBE/THRILL JOCKEY. CD/DL/LP

Third studio LP from the much-lauded French/Canadian singer-songwriter.

It's 10 years since Myriam Gendron released her first album, *Not So Deep As A Well*, and although she's only recorded another two since, you hear that decade's worth of change in *Mayday*. Recorded following the death of her mother, and with a title that signifies both hope and a cry for help, *Mayday* may still be rooted in the delicate, variegated folk tradition of *Not So Deep*… and 2021's double album *Ma Délire*, and Gendron's deep alto remains warm and wise, but this is a very different proposition altogether. Working with free folk guitarists Marisa Anderson and Bill Nace, plus Dirty Three drummer Jim White, Gendron places her gorgeous songs on a far more uneasy footing, seeking out new, strange routes for these ancient folk roots, resulting in an album that is both comforting and confounding, and depthless in its strange beauty.

Andrew Male

Swamp Dogg

★★★★

Blackgrass: From West Virginia To 125th St.

OH BOY. CD/DL/LP

The Virginian maverick's answer to Beyoncé's *Cowboy Carter*.

After a 70-year career characterised by raunchy pastiche and novelty opportunism, Swamp Dogg, né Jerry Williams, Jr., now 81, here materialises with a Nashville record just weeks after our era's biggest black pop artist arrived with hers. While Williams also recorded with top Music City musicians, similarities with Beyoncé are otherwise few: the opening tunes, bawdy Mess Under That Dress and comic Ugly Man's Wife, are regulation Dogg with added banjos, but from there *Blackgrass* becomes a more sober journey into broader American roots styles. Songs To Sing revisits a Williams-penned civil rights slow-burner fit for Otis Redding, while Margo Price and Jenny Lewis each lend their voice to romantic country-got-soul Swamp oldies (respectively: To The Other Woman; Count The Days), with stirring results. For closer Murder Ballad, this perennial joker's chillingly strapped into the electric chair *à la* Nick Cave's The Mercy Seat. Far from a lame genre exercise, this is Williams winningly flexing his more substantial songwriterly muscles.

Andrew Perry

Lenny Kravitz

★★★★

Blue Electric Light

ROXIE/BMG. CD/DL/LP

Genre-hopping US songwriter/rock star goes big on album number 12.

Lenny Kravitz spent lockdown on a creative hot streak in the Bahamas. He re-emerged from his tropical paradise with enough for four potential albums, including this double. His first release in six years corrals every facet of what turned past records, including 1993's *Are You Gonna Go My Way*, into multi-platinum hits. There's a lightness to some of it, especially the charming Honey, and Human, which hitches its self-empowerment lyric ("I'm gonna live my truth in this life…") to the sweetest pop melody. Elsewhere, though, Kravitz plays to the gallery with TK421's hefty James Brown-meets-Prince funk rock and Paralyzed's nod to Led Zeppelin's When The Levee Breaks. These and It's Just Another Fine Day (In This Universe Of Love) – surely the most Lenny Kravitz title ever – best demonstrate his knack for sprinkling self-help-speak and catwalk glamour on his classic rock and soul. On *Blue Electric Light*, he hasn't lost his touch.

Mark Blake

Ezra Feinberg

★★★★

Soft Power

TONAL UNION. DL/LP

Painterly improvisation and melody drive ex-Citay guitarist's third solo album.

A psycho-analyst by day, previous Feinberg outings (2018's *Pentimento And Others*, 2020's *Recumbent Speech*) revealed a versatile guitarist by night, specialising in slow-building, hypnotic compositions. From Pose Beams' spectral piano touches and undulating drones to the title track's clipped motifs and subtle synth washes, to the Christmassy, music box feel of Flutter Intensity, his latest draws maximum emotional return from sparse arrangements. Elsewhere, There Was Somebody There is a fecund exercise in moody one-chord interplay, while Feinberg dives deep into kosmische waters on The Big Clock, the pulsing groove and serpentine synths recalling his past in psych torchbearers Citay. A soundtrack to serenity and contemplation, *Soft Power* takes an individualist approach to amorphous territory previously navigated by Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Brian Eno, delivered with balm-like grace.

Andy Cowan

Niamh Regan

★★★★

Come As You Are

FACTION. CD/DL/LP

Moving, genre-busting second album from Galway original.

The opening track here is astonishing. Madonna starts with innocent Nick Drake-style guitar before swirling into stream-of-consciousness lyrics, the vocal barely brushing the words as a sweet melody unfolds. But you glean that something's very wrong – "Taxi asking, you OK?" In a surreal jazz scat, Regan sing-songs like Ophelia: "You're too pretty for me to say chivalry's dead…" Magisterially sinister. Belly is louche indie rock, gruff as Aimee Mann or Amy Winehouse as she awaits a dubious-sounding partner "with knots in my belly… like a shaky little horse on the prairie". On the other hand, Waves has Regan conversing with herself over piano before it builds to a sweaty, celebratory, orchestral anthem that leaves you wrung out and grinning. There's hypnotic late-night deep synths, plus a woozy, bespangled hidden track. In all, intelligent and beautifully idiosyncratic.

Glyn Brown

English Teacher

★★★★

This Could Be Texas

ISLAND. CD/DL/LP

An extraordinary salvo of acid wit and wisdom from skilled quartet of Leeds Conservatoire graduates.

Three years ago, English Teacher started making ripples with R&B, a song that satirised expectations of the kind of music vocalist Lily Fontaine might perform. "Despite appearances, I haven't got the voice for R&B," she deadpanned, acidly, over an urgent bass line and trippy-up motorik beat. It was the debut of a singular creative intellect that often elevates *This Could Be Texas* into the realms of the sublime, whether Fontaine's ruminating on the sobering truth that Not Everybody Gets To Go To Space or defiantly refusing to be The World's Biggest Paving Slab. Musically, modern post-punk tropes abound – sprechgesang vocals, angular bass lines, sudden intense squalls of guitar – but the group's classical training also facilitates breathtaking flights into avant-garde territory: the epic title track with its dancing piano figures and doleful viola, or the mournful, Floydian highlight You Blister My Paint. All quite stunning.

Pat Gilbert

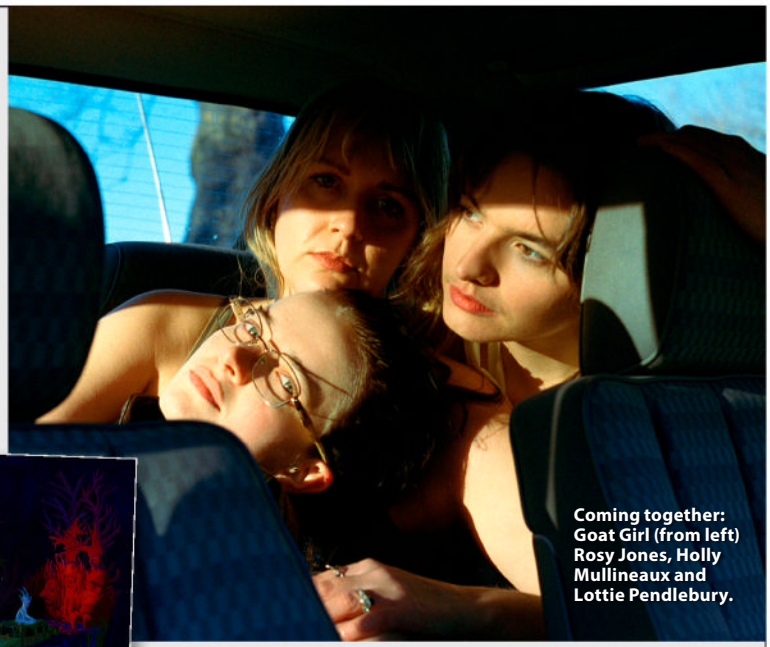
Goat Girl

★★★★

Below The Waste

ROUGH TRADE. CD/DL/LP

South London trio's hard-fought third is a triumph.



Coming together: Goat Girl (from left) Rosy Jones, Holly Mullineaux and Lottie Pendlebury.

BORN OUT of Brixton's scuzzy Windmill scene, Goat Girl quickly sidestepped the easy certainties of that venue's staple rowdy post-punk for a more thoughtful and superficially opaque breed of guitar rock, majoring on socio-political observation and subtle melodic bounty. After 2021's rambling second LP, *On All Fours*, the band were initially impacted by drummer Rosy Jones's addiction problems, and its successor's one moment of shouty discord arrives on Jones-sung TCNC, an acronym coined by their mother during a (successful) intervention: "take care, not crack". Elsewhere, singer/guitarist Lottie Pendlebury voices helplessness at Jones's problem (Words Fell Out), while bassist Holly Mullineaux's Take It Away documents friends' collective desire nevertheless to support them, and it's this sense of community, along with wider corporate/political power-wielding (see moody closer Wasting), which is *Below The Waste*'s guiding motivation. To that end, Goat Girl grapple with strings, makeshift choirs, electronics and mellotron in a quietly exploratory set of off-centre tunes and potent lyrical questioning.

Andrew Perry

Let's do it again

Miraculous comeback album from long-lost gospel group following rediscovery of their 1975 debut. By Stevie Chick.

Redemption songs: Staples Jr Singers' Annie Brown Caldwell (left) and R.C. Brown.

Staples Jr Singers

★★★★

Searching

LUAKA BOP. CD/DL/LP

IN THE 1970s the Staples Jr Singers spent every weekend celebrating their Lord at churches and talent competitions all across the Bible belt. Teenage members of the Brown family from Aberdeen, Mississippi (the group named themselves after Pops, Mavis and co., their idols but not their relatives), the Singers recorded their 1975 debut album *When Do We Get Paid* in a pokey studio in Tupelo. Its 12 funky, soulful devotionals were something special, but the group could only afford to press 500 copies, which they sold at concerts or to friends and neighbours – hardly a path to stardom.

If it was nothing short of miraculous that Luaka Bop plucked *When Do We Get Paid* from obscurity by reissuing it in 2022, how do you describe news that the three surviving Singers – Edward Brown, R.C. Brown and Annie Brown Caldwell – have reunited for a follow-up almost half-a-century on? *Searching* is another family affair, recorded over two nights last summer at a modest church near Annie's home, the Singers' backing band composed of their sons and grandsons.

Searching is a markedly different record to its predecessor, its mood darker, its blues deeper. As teens, the Singers conjured concepts of temptation, suffering and salvation they couldn't possibly have understood. Now, however, when Annie sings of losing her "darling mother", of being knocked "back down on my knees" by her brother, of struggling to stick to the straight and narrow, there's a stinging truthfulness to her words, and to her harrowing cry of, "Lord, I'm trying hard just to make it." It's heavy.

As ever with gospel, though, redemption awaits, and those intervening decades only make the glimmers of optimism more profound. On I've Got A Feeling, the Singers' wiry voices wander joyfully about the melody, their papery rasps of "everything is gonna be all right" poignantly reassuring. The elegiac seven-minute glide of I Don't Need Nobody But You again tallies the Singers' "hard times", but in gratitude for their ultimate survival ("the Lord kept his arms around us"). Edward's dream of deliverance from his "old body" into the arms of Jesus is delivered with a frail fervour that can't help but move even the most agnostic.

Searching closes with a revisit of Get On Board, from their debut. The original perhaps struggled to draw true meaning from clichés like "the road gets rough and the going gets tough". But here, accompanied only by organ and lyrical guitar, R.C. delivers the song in a voice freighted with all they've experienced in the intervening years – the perished dreams, the beloved siblings they've buried – and wrests hope from the darkness. Like much of *Searching*, it's a remarkable, humbling moment, underscoring just how precious this unlikely rejuvenation truly is.

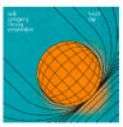
Will Gregory Moog Ensemble

★★★★

Heat Ray

MUTE. CD/DL/LP

One-half of Goldfrapp pays unrestrained homage to Archimedes.



Over its nine tracks, *Heat Ray* encompasses Bernard Herrmann-esque tension, the grandeur of Vangelis at his most dramatic, minimalist abstraction and nods to John Carpenter's soundtracks. Analogue synthesizers seamlessly fuse with full orchestration to overpowering effect. What's effectively the first solo album by Goldfrapp's Will Gregory draws from his fascination with Archimedes: each track deals with a marker in the life of questing mathematician/inventor of Ancient Greek. The Will Gregory Moog Ensemble has on-and-off played live for close-to 20 years, so this culminates a long-standing fascination with vintage synths. Here, Daniel Miller and Adrian Utley are amongst the ensemble. The classically trained originator of this monolith has created the Piccard In Space opera, interpreted Bach, composed for the Royal Shakespeare Company, written and played soundtracks and much more. *Heat Ray* could never be anything other than ambitious. A mind-blowing experience.

Kieron Tyler

Adam Wissing

Paul Weller

★★★★

66

POLYDOR. CD/DL/LP

The Modfather and star collaborators celebrate his sixty-sixth birthday.

Up until lockdown's *Fat Pop (Volume 1)*, each Weller album post-2008 possessed a distinct tang. But like its predecessor, *66* prefers to build on tested patterns, from Flying Fish's slick '70s disco to the celestial soul-electronica of In Full Flight. Up front is the delightful folk strum of Ship Of Fools – lyrics by Suggs – and Jumble Queen, a head-banging Mod-rocker co-write with Noel Gallagher, auguring an unsettling mid-LP suite that sounds like late-era Style Council for ever more uncertain times, the Gallic waltz of My Best Friend's Coat chief among them. There are missteps in the over-emoted Sleepy Hollow and I Woke Up, but otherwise earworm melodies abound, most strikingly in A Glimpse Of You and eco-lamenting Burn Out. There's a sense throughout of Weller, the inveterate seeker, grasping for something tantalisingly out of reach – and, in doing so, creating a record of recurrent intrigue and frequent sublimity.

Pat Gilbert

Hawkwind

★★★★

Stories From Time And Space

CHERRY RED. CD/DL/LP

The space rock methuselahs' 36th LP considers The End.

Hawkfans were troubled in April when it was rumoured that the group's 82-year-old skipper Dave Brock was retiring from live performance. Luckily, August dates are going ahead, but there's nothing like a brush with finality to focus the mind. Hawkwind's latest comes in hard, with synth druid Thighpaulsandra's modules set to elegiac on opener Our Lives Can't Last Forever, a requiem for a long existence that tacitly acknowledges how the blazing Future as it was once envisaged has yet to arrive. Yet the imaginative fire still burns: with its Fripp-like feedback guitar, Traveller Of Time And Space depicts a veteran interstellar refuse contractor trucking on, while the stark-prog Frozen In Time depicts the last human hoping for a new cycle of cosmic rebirth. Elsewhere, the cosmic rock churn, space jazz and escape velocity electronics sound nothing like a sign-off. Will space rock's Old Contemptibles fight another day? We can but hope.

Ian Harrison

Stephen Pastel & Gavin Thomson

★★★

This Is Memorial Device

GEOGRAPHIC/DOMINO. DL/LP

Music from the stage play of David Keenan's magic-realist post-punk novel.

Published in 2017, Keenan's cult novel about fictional combos "in Airdrie, Coatbridge and environs 1978-86" conjuring alchemical forces, has itself enjoyed an extraordinary afterlife, with Graham Eatough's theatrical adaptation a hit at last year's Edinburgh festival. Here, sizeable chunks of actors' monologue, in keeping with the book's oral-history format, are interspersed with tracks and scoring from the play, which marks Stephen McRobbie's first LP since The Pastels' *Slow Summits* (2013). Concocted together with Findo Gask's Gavin Thomson, the most plausible Memorial approximation comes with We Have Sex (later reprised as The Most Beautiful House In Airdrie), although its synthy groove more resembles contemporary squat-punks Snapped Ankles. The rest is regulation soundtrack fare, made up of Satie piano and atmospherics (Chinese Moon) or Mogwai-in-quiet-mode (Footsteps In The Snow) – useful theatrically, but on record it's more the spoken-word sections that grab the listener.

Andrew Perry

On a trip: Seasick Steve covers fresh ground on his latest.

Seasick Steve

★★★★

A Trip A Stumble A Fall Down On Your Knees

SO RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

More from self-made myth Steven Gene Wold.

SEASICK STEVE counsels folks wishing to stay limber thus: do the Backbone Slip. It's a dance move the 73-year-old demonstrates in the song's accompanying video, and Internet Cowboys has floor-filling potential too, its square-dancing groove ripe for a Beyoncé-does-Dolly remix. The title of Seasick's thirteenth alludes to its easy, almost accidental gestation, and while themes of solitude and escape sit well with the enigmatic bluesman image our twinkle-eyed host has preserved fairly well for nigh-on 20 years, there's fresh ground here, too. The title track shows Seasick's skill with Curtis Mayfield licks, not just cigar-box guitar slide, while Funky Music, a nod to Sly & The Family Stone and Tower Of Power, has plenty of sass. Harmonica-led campfire ballad Elizabeth, meanwhile, pays further respect to Seasick's late wife.

James McNair

Kneecap

★★★★

Fine Art

HEAVENLY. CD/DL/LP

Riotous debut full-length from ribald West Belfast rap trio.

Hip-hop thrives at making the local global, whether set within a West Coast housing project or an imaginary West Belfast hostelry. A boozer named The Rutz serves as the fictional hub for the adventures of rappers Mo Chara, Móglaí Bap and DJ Próvaí, who spiel in English and Irish of mischief, drugs and good times. The music, produced by Toddla T, skates between speaker-wrecking grime (Fine Art), Gaelic folktronica (3CAG, featuring Lankum's Radie Peat) and joyriding rave (I bhFiacha Linne). Their stories, meanwhile, lurch with haywire momentum through cocaine highs (I'm Flush), inevitable comedowns (the downbeat Better Way To Live, featuring Fontaines D.C.'s Grian Chatten) and lurid tall tales (the gonzo Rhino Ket). The wild times end on a poignant, giddy high with Parful – a house-y banger raving about everyday hedonism transcending sectarian violence – an irresistible distillation of Kneecap's peacetime party music.

Stevie Chick

Andy Willsher

Group Listening

★★★★

Walks

PRAH. DL/LP

Promenade-inspired pastoralism from Welsh keyboard/woodwind duo.

Paul Jones and Stephen Black's third album as Group Listening reprises the wordless, analogue ambient template mapped out on its predecessor, *Clarinet & Piano: Selected Works, Vol. 2*, itself a development from the duo's 2019 *Selected Works Vol. 1* debut, which ingenuously re-imagined instrumentals by the likes of Arthur Russell and Hans-Joachim Roedelius. Owing its genesis to the duo's regular between-gig hikes, as well as Robert Walser's early-20th century travel-based novella, Der Spaziergang, this is music that strolls wistfully but deliberately along. Typically, New Brighton finds Black's lugubrious clarinet lines wafting impressionistically over a heartbeat drum machine and Jones's liminal electric piano shadings, while the sauntering, heat-hazed Old Reeds might have fallen off Cluster's similarly Arcadian *Sowiesoso*. Proceedings draw to a serene close on Welcome To Denge, an ambient étude pitched winningly between New Age reverie and bucolic '70s library music.

David Sheppard

Yaya Bey

★★★★

Ten Fold

BIG DADA. CD/DL/LP

Brooklyn alt-R&B maverick entrances with hard-won self-assertion and gritty polemic.

On 2022's breakthrough *Remember Your North Star*, Bey was processing the departure of two significant others (one her husband, the other her manager), often with colourful gallows humour. In the interim, she both lost her father, Ayub (AKA '80s Juice Crew rapper Grand Daddy IU), and also identified as genderqueer, all charging this follow-up with an even fiercer sense of soul-mining and self-assertion, while still voicing socio-political concerns. Community activism fuels Eric Adams In The Club, calling out NYC's mayor on street-level hardship. As on her debut, beats are minimal, bordering on lo-fi, allowing Bey space to voice in meditative jazzy runs whose no-messing eccentricity strongly recalls primetime Erykah Badu. Slow Dancing In The Kitchen's ghostly reggae nods to her Caribbean ethnicity, but Sir Princess Bad Bitch's Moodymann-ish disco nails her message best: "I wouldn't never rather be/No other thing but the thing I am".

Andrew Perry

Blitzen Trapper

★★★

100's Of 1000's, Millions Of Billions

YEP ROC. CD/DL/LP

Spiritually-inclined psychedelic folk from veteran Portland alt-rockers.

Blitzen Trapper's frontman Eric Earley found Buddhism around the time of his group's last album, 2020's *Holy Smokes Future Jokes*. This, their eleventh studio release in an off/on two-decade career, is named after a phrase from a Buddhist scripture, and full of songs about life, death, the cosmos, and Earley's convict uncle, Tommy, who fled a prison chain gang with the help of a gullible traffic cop. All these vignettes are delivered through a haze of plangent piano and guitar, but with some charming pop melodies to the fore. Sometimes it's a little too hazy, but Planetarium (with Washington singer-songwriter Anna Tivel on backing vocals) and Hesher In The Rain (about a lovesick heavy metal drummer named Herman) reset the balance. Best of all, Cosmic Backseat Education captures what Blitzen Trapper often do best: delightfully off-kilter drive-time rock minus the clichés.

Mark Blake

Joe Gideon

★★★★

Altered Self

LABELMAN. DL/LP

London alt-rocker's third solo venture, partnered with Bad Seed Jim Sclavunos.

A quarter-century on from his emergence with London post-rockers Bikini Atoll, and 15 years since teaming up with his sister Viva Seifert as Joe Gideon & The Shark, this brooding songsmith is now making his most substantive records alongside Sclavunos in a 'solo' capacity. Really, it's the two of them, the Bad Seed's percussive wallop and JG's Blixa Bargeldian six-string clang, with each tinkering on synths and noise-generating nick-nacks, all in service of Gideon's labyrinthine compositions about storms and spiders. At their most succinct, piano-driven Bird Of Prey recalls John Cale circa *Fear*, with added Cormac McCarthy-esque narrative foreboding, while Arctic Moon, written in Cornish isolation, simmers in elemental mystery within Sclavunos's luminous production. Elsewhere, particularly finale Wild & Free, structural shackles evaporate as Gideon's fever-dream visions approach Michael Gira-style intensity – if mercifully quieter. Fans of Mark Lanegan and '80s Nick Cave take note.

Andrew Perry

The Avett Brothers

★★★★

The Avett Brothers

RAMSEUR/AMERICAN/THIRTY TIGERS. CD/DL/LP

Scott and Seth's eleventh LP. Back to basics they go.

The somewhat mixed reaction to the overt politicking of *Closer Than Together* – which ended their run of three consecutive US Top 10 LPs – has forced The Avett Brothers into retreat. They've kept faith with Rick Rubin, their producer since 2009's *I And Love And You*, but they've returned to more conventional love paeans and childhood reminiscences, such as Country Kid ("Shootin' hoops in the dirt/Hidin' smokes in the pocket of a homemade shirt"). Musically, though, they're still questing. As ever, Rubin gives his clients space to take multiple tangents, so while the rip-roaring Love Of A Girl owes much to Jet's Are You Gonna Be My Girl, the straight-down-the-line 2020 Regret is ripe to be covered by a country megastar, and standout Same Broken Bones builds from an a cappella opening into keyboards-led gorgeousness.

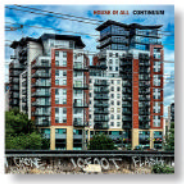
John Aizlewood

Astrel K
★★★
The Foreign Department
TOUGH LOVE. CD/DL/LP
Stockholm-based Brit Rhys Edwards' second LP scans like automatic writing therapy for the broken-hearted abroad. Songs brim with rapid-fire imagery, pitching between anxiety and hope over an indie pop-meets-Krautrock kaleidoscope of layered sounds and keyboard shimmers. *JB*

Awen Ensemble
★★★★
Cadair Idris
NEW SOIL. CD/DL/LP
Mysticism runs deep on this folk-jazz octet's evocation of a night on the Cadair Idris mountain. Bodhráns, warm Rhodes, tender brass and funky backbeats align with Amy Clark's pure vocals as spectres of John And Beverley Martyn and Pentangle rush by. *AC*

Morgan Garrett
★★★
Purity
ORANGE MILK. DL/LP
Garrett darkly captures the Appalachian Ohioan's response to finding a neighbour's dead body. From the discordant figures of Alive to the stop-start mutations of I've Already Died, he offsets his feedback-blasted avant-rock with ghostly vocal murmurations. Don't listen alone. *AC*

Chihei Hatakeyama & Shun Ishiwaka
★★★★
Magnificent Little Dudes Volume I
GEARBOX. DL/LP
This union of ambient sound artist and experimental drummer has a free jazz heartbeat: a haze of warped Boards Of Canada choirs, Kevin Shields guitar and off-the-wall percussive ticks. *AC*



House Of All
★★★★
Continuum
TINY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS. CD/DL/LP
Ejected from The Fall, Martin Bramah now leads an old comrades faction in a spirit of celebration and redress. On album two, he spiels implications of war, the occult and the everyday bizarre over sounds that would suit a mid-'80s Fall album. *IH*

Karate Boogaloo
★★★
Hold Your Horses
COLEMINE. CD/DL/LP
The second set of originals from Melbourne instrumental soul combo: a readymade blaxploitation soundtrack, with unexpected detours. The cinematic flurry of There Is No Rush and the tense swirling organs of PS EmmyLou hold up against their Meters and M.G.'s influences. *AC*

The Lovely Eggs
★★★★
Eggsistentialism
EGG. DL/LP
Co-produced with Dave Fridmann, Lancaster UK duo drill down into the state of the creative nation, contrasting bleak truths with giddy popsike (Everything/Nothing), bubbling defiance (People TV) and a rebuff to arts-funding BS (Death Grips Kid: "Screw your creative practice/ Just let us get on with it"). *JB*

Man Man
★★★★
Carrot On Strings
SUB POP. CD/DL/LP
Ryan Kattner's 20-year arc from jazz-refracted art punk to eccentric rock sophisticate continues, with Ween-like oddness. Standouts on his seventh LP include the droll, Arctic Monkeys-in-space pop of Cryptoad, Pack Your Bags' Milk & Alcohol groove, and Alibi's Steely Dan glam. *JB*

The Prisoners
★★★★
Morning Star
OWN UP. CD/DL/LP
Triumphant comeback from a great '80s garage band. Recorded at Abbey Road, it captures the irascible Medway four – Day, Crockford, Taylor, Symons – unleashing their frustrations through battling Hammond organ and Who guitars, with Marriott soul vocals on top. *LW*

Samana
★★★★
Samana
THE ROAD. CD/DL/LP
The spiritual grounding between Rebecca Rose Harris and Franklin Mockett drives this strident blend of slowcore, blues and yacht rock, with melodic surprises and ghostly vocals. Morricone meets Cowboy Junkies on Into The Blue, while The Knife feels like a lost goth classic. *AC*

EXTENDED PLAY

Rise again: The Fall (from left) Marc Riley, Paul Hanley, Steve Hanley, Craig Scanlon.

The Fall
Slates Live!
BELLA UNION/POPSTOCK. EP
1981 six-track EP Slates is one of the essential Fall documents, where every irregular element tessellated into visionary, satiric malevolence. Now former members Craig Scanlon, Marc Riley and the Hanley brothers have advanced through the badlands of Fall archive reissues to re-curate Slates on its original 10-inch format, cherry-picking contemporary live versions from Britain and Europe. The audio quality varies a bit – a doubled-in-length Prole Art Threat sounds like it was recorded in an aircraft hangar – but the dredger bass, poltergeist guitars and rockabilly-Burundi-beats power through, with late psycho-lector Mark E Smith at peak form, adding a dig at "fat English dicks in Mexican hats" to Middle Mass, giving it up for "extreme nit-picking" in Slates, Slags Etc, and injecting exuberant spleen into the anti-metropolis Leave The Capitol.

Ian Harrison

Still House Plants
★★★★
If I Don't Make It, I Love U
BISON. CD/DL/LP
Hard to pin down these stealth new stars of UK art-rock, with drums between free jazz and hip-hop, sinewy inventive guitar crank and Jess Hickie-Kallenbach's baleful soul voice. A millennial Shudder To Think, maybe? Chewy, but excellent. *JM*

Amy Aileen Wood
★★★
The Heartening
COLORFIELD. DL/LP
Well-connected LA session drummer takes her core skills into playful new spaces informed by jazz and electronica. Rolling Stops and Time For Everything touch on a kind of deconstructed chamber-pop, with Wood's old employer Fiona Apple adding wordless vocals and giggles. *JM*

Paul Husband

Stardust memories

The mother of all rock'n'roll fantasies is given the all-encompassing deluxe box set treatment. He stooped to conquer, says **Mark Paytress.**

David Bowie

★★★★

Rock 'N' Roll Star!

PARLOPHONE. CD/DL/BR

AFTER ENDLESS reissues, Ziggy Stardust returns under cover of *Rock 'N' Roll Star!*, a 5-CD, one audio-only Blu-Ray, two-book box set. It closes in October 1972 at Boston on the first US tour. But it's where it begins that's the real bombshell.

Likely guided by the hand of Bowie, who watched over his archive, the entire Ziggy Stardust escapade – song, album, live show, get-out-of-jail alter ego – can now be traced back to one stridently strummed acoustic demo sketched out in February 1971 in a San Francisco hotel room. Titled So Long '60s, its chords and melody are instantly recognisable as Moonage Daydream. The lyric is roughly the "Keep your mouth shut" verse sung twice, before bidding "So long, Jimi". (Hendrix, the left-handed superstar guitarist who died five months earlier, is long regarded as an inspiration for Ziggy.) This surprise find is Bowie's 'good riddance' message to the decade that refused to take him seriously. "So long, decline," he concludes.

So Long '60s is Bowie's tabula rasa, one that enables him to introduce a more playful sound and attitude that would serve him well in a post-Bolan era. But it took almost a year for the fictional rock star's rise and fall to develop into a loose storyline-driven album.

The best of . . . *Star!*'s 29 unreleased cuts appear on Disc 1 which is split into three parts: Songwriting Demos, Arnold Corns and Haddon Hall Rehearsals. After the initial shock, we're on familiar territory with Hang On To Yourself, also taped during Bowie's promotional visit to the States. This previously bootlegged cut doesn't feature Gene Vincent as rumoured. But it does find Bowie hitching his mast to upbeat rock'n'roll, part Eddie Cochran, part Velvet Underground.

BACK STORY: ID CRISIS

● Bowie had an identity problem. Entering the biz as plain Davie/Davy Jones, he found himself competing with future Monkee Davy Jones. As David Bowie, he hit big with Space Oddity in 1969, only to become typecast as a one-hit wonder. He'd spend the next two years searching for a new role. Enter Ziggy Stardust…

© The David Bowie Archive. Photo by Masayoshi Sukita

Back home and motivated, he quickly assembles a bunch of nobodies, names them Arnold Corns and reworks the two US demos. It's clearly an attempt to emulate Andy Warhol's Svengali role with the Velvets, only Bowie also writes and sings. He introduces a new, strained, high-camp squealer voice, sung incognito for fear his outgoing record company might lay claim to the songs. One of the hallmarks of Ziggy's style was born out of necessity.

By March, he's demo-ing Lady Stardust on piano and Ziggy Stardust (with its distinctive riff already intact) on guitar. Another demo, the previously unheard piano-rocker Star (AKA Stars) likely taped in May, confirms that a Ziggy and Star theme was already materialising by late spring. Nevertheless, he hands the song to a band called Chameleon, whose recording still knocks about. Unfortunately, it's not here.

By June, now with Mick Ronson and Woody Woodmansey back after a year's absence along with fellow Hull renegade Trevor Bolder on bass, Bowie's about to record *Hunky Dory*. But an Arnold Corns follow-up is contractually obliged, so despite losing interest, he writes a relaxed, Stones-style singalong Looking For A Friend before work on *Hunky Dory* takes over.

"The entire project, from the music to the ideas Bowie attached to it, marked a genuine shift from pop's past."

Disc 1 concludes with previously unheard rehearsals taped at the band's communal-like HQ Haddon Hall in early November, days before going into the studio to record *Ziggy*. Bowie met Lou Reed and Iggy Pop in New York weeks earlier while signing a deal with RCA and is now clearly on a mission. Soul Love and Ziggy Stardust sound ready to go; Star (knowingly?) steals the drum pattern from Hendrix's I Don't Live Today; Holy Holy (a revamp of Bowie's flop 45 from late 1970) and the gleefully filthy Sweet Head were also studio recorded but later dropped.

A solo demo of Soul Love, placed earlier on Disc 1, also dates from this time. This comes with illuminating instructions from Bowie to Mick Ronson concerning the arrangement. It's followed by a verse/chorus snippet, then a full acoustic demo of Starman taped in January 1972. Written to order as 'the hit', Starman sounds remarkably assured, though Bowie's slide guitar overdub is 'exploratory'.

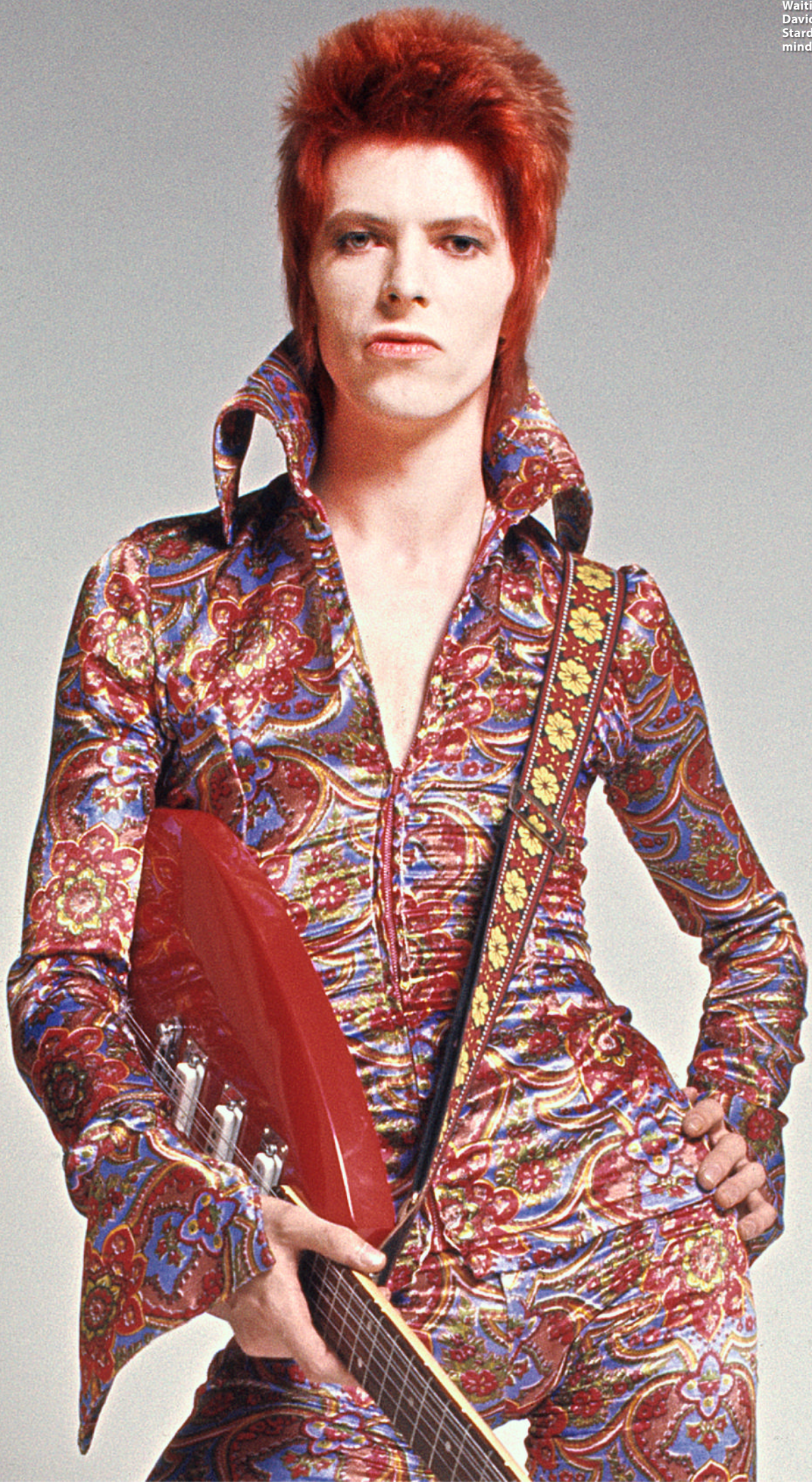
Discs 2 and 3 are essential if familiar, given they document sessions taped for the BBC, from an unreleased January 1972 Peel session to the version of Starman taped for Top Of The Pops in July. The 'found' session – off-air and still missing Hang On To Yourself – includes the roaring Velvet Underground homage Queen Bitch from the just-released *Hunky Dory* and one Velvets original, Waiting For The Man. Both bolster Bowie's new contrary aesthetic.

Inevitably, there's repetition here as on previous set *Divine Symmetry*, which journeyed through *Hunky Dory*. The first half of Disc 4 comprises single mixes and previously released outtakes; the second features the five surviving tracks from the October 1, 1972 show in Boston, USA, with My Death the only official newcomer.

By contrast, everything on Disc 5 is fresh to this box. Most are either outtakes or alternative versions remixed by original engineer Ken Scott. The key curio is Shadow Man, presented here as a composite from two different *Ziggy* sessions takes, with Scott aptly adding reverb. One line, "The shadow man is really you", anticipates the unfolding Bowie/Ziggy relationship. Perhaps it's why he didn't want the song on the album…

While Scott's new mixes sparkle, the 2012 *Ziggy Stardust* album master dug out for the Blu-Ray seems a misstep given that Atmos is an industry standard now. Plenty more fun is *Waiting In The Sky (Before The Starman Came To Earth)*. It's taken from the original December 15, 1971 master and features the original *Ziggy* running-order, including four songs that didn't make the final cut. Two accompanying books flesh out the package. One is a 36-page repro of Bowie's *Ziggy*-era notebooks featuring handwritten lyrics, track-listings, sketches and a curious reference to 'Emile And The Feel'. The main 112-page book is packed with track info, original reviews, interviews old and new plus plenty of period memorabilia and photos.

A headline used regularly around the time of *Ziggy*'s release in June 1972 was 'A STAR IS BORN'. Well, Starman hit Number 10; the album Number 5. Nevertheless, Bowie quickly became the most talked-about performer in Britain because the entire project, from the music to the ideas Bowie attached to it, marked a genuine shift from pop's past. There's no doubt that with Ziggy Stardust, Bowie achieved what he'd set out to do: ta-ta '60s. You betcha!



Waiting in the sky: David Bowie/Ziggy Stardust blows minds in 1972.

Masquerade ball: welcome to Stereolab's eternally stimulating party.

Stereolab

★★★★

Switched On Volumes 1-5

DUOPHONIC UHF DISKS/WARP. CD/DL

The ultimate Groop therapy: 8-CDs, 94 tracks, 440 minutes.

LIKE MANY long-term Stereolab ultras, your correspondent is not averse to occasionally checking the value of their old vinyl on Discogs: currently, 1993's Shimmies In Super 8 double 7-inch (also featuring Huggy Bear and Darlin', AKA Daft Punk) appears to be worth from £175 to £484. Fortunately, a lot of those collectibles – including Revox from Shimmies – have been kept in near-mint condition thanks to the *Switched On* series of comps, five in all, themselves compiled on this encyclopaedic and fun box set. Collecting multitudes of singles and rarities from the band's original 1990-2009 run, the neologic genres come thick and fast – Avant ye-ye electronica! Tropical motorik-pop! – mapping how Stereolab's inquisitive spirit drove them through constant musical evolutions. And among the indie-club exotica like French Disko, there are semi-forgotten surprises, not least a squelchy jam on Jobim's One Note Samba with jazz flute maestro Herbie Mann. Also available: *Little Pieces Of Stereolab*, a typically quixotic 15-track sampler for newcomers to this eternally stimulating party.

John Mulvey

Various

★★★

No Songs Tomorrow: Darkwave, Ethereal Rock And Coldwave 1981-1990

CHERRY RED. CD

Four discs of post-punk synth music for the sombrely disposed.

Ever the purveyors of a micro-genre box set, Cherry Red here target one which initially never got christened, hence the title's speculative three-pronged definition. As such, *No Songs Tomorrow* performs a vital service for those fixated on this marginal seam of gloomy '80s goth/synth futurism, directly descended from David Bowie's *Low* and The Cure's *Faith* (The Funeral Party opens Disc One). The ensuing tracklist includes but a sprinkling from the mainstream-indie universe (Soft Cell, early Cocteau Twins, indeed most early 4AD), instead plunging deep into a black-clad international underground, which ranges from the operatic tribalism of Sheffield's In The Nursery, via myriad Euro-obscurities like Switzerland's all-female The Vyllies and earnest Norwegians Fra Lippo Lippi, through to Stateside synth-rockers like Philadelphia's flange-heavy Executive Slacks. It's niche and then some: five hours of music, after which most listeners will likely crave sunshine, and a pile of Beach Boys albums.

Andrew Perry

Jean Claude Dhein

Ziad Rahbani

★★★

Amrak Seedna & Abtal Wa Harameyah

WEWANTSOUNDS. LP

Arabic music blends with funk and fusion jazz on vinyl reissue of cult Lebanese composer's 1987 epic.

Capturing satirical soundtracks to two theatre plays by Antoine Kerbaj, written amid the Lebanese civil war, this latest reissue captures Ziad Rahbani at his most mischievous and playful. Restless and musically curious, the son of musician Assi Rahbani and singer Fairu is in typically cross-cultural form here, blithely mixing Eastern melodies with James Brown funk, burbling synths, bright horns and jazzy keys on *Amrak Seedna*. His *Abtal Wa Harameyah* soundtrack heads even farther out, frequent inversions of the James Bond Theme offset with back-alley jazz laments, perky music hall and scat duets over relentless slap bass. Long out-of-print, for devotees of the Arabic groove, Rahbani's rousing mix of disco drums, cocktail pianos and swooning strings boasts wider appeal.

Andy Cowan

Pete Townshend

All The Best Cowboys Have Chinese Eyes

★★★

White City: A Novel

★★★★

UMR. LP

Who bandleader's '80s solo ventures, now on half-speed mastered vinyl.

Pete Townshend's third solo release was recorded while The Who were preparing their supposedly final album, 1982's *It's Hard*, and their composer was deep in drugs and marital hell. For 1985's *White City*, Townshend was sober and back in the family home but had broken up The Who. Both LPs proved too modish for the fanbase, and neither was a hit. But *All The Best Cowboys*…'s cloying early-'80s production is redeemed by the yearning The Sea Refuses No River and Somebody Saved Me (the last of which was also recorded by The Who). Meanwhile, the superior *White City* re-imagined the large west London council estate as a symbol of what Townshend called "the swan song days of the British Empire", with a messy riot of pop, rock and awkward swing-jazz and, on Give Blood and White City Fighting, Pink Floyd's David Gilmour throwing broody guitar shapes.

Mark Blake

The Aggrovators

★★★★

Dubbing At King Tubby's Vol. 1 & 2

GORGON/VP. LP

Prime heavyweight sounds from 18 Dromilly Avenue, Kingston, 1975-79.

Originally released on reggae reissue label Blood & Fire's *Dub Gone Crazy 1 & 2* and *Dub Like Dirt* compilations from the mid- to late-'90s, *Dubbing… 1 & 2* remasters and re-sequences all 44 tracks from those three superlative LPs for this RSD (and beyond) release. And what a joyful noise it still is, mixing-desk genius King Tubby, plus disciples Prince Jammy, Phillip Smart, Pat Kelly and Scientist, dubbing to oblivion diamond-hard rhythms laid down by producer Bunny 'Striker' Lee's crack house band The Aggrovators (a fluid line-up which included drummer Sly Dunbar and bass titan Robbie Shakespeare). There's a haunting, spiritual quality to these sound-paintings, Tubby/Jammy especially conjuring something akin to psychedelia on standouts Guidance Dub, Bag A Wire Dub and Jah Love Rockers Dub with aquatic reverb, valley-deep bass, shuddering echo and detonating thunderclaps. Comprehensive linernotes would have pushed this re-reissue to five stars, but *Dubbing…* is nonetheless a winning overview of the fruitful Striker/Tubby alliance.

Simon McEwen

Jackie DeShannon

★★★★

Nothing Can Stop Me: Liberty Records Rarities 1960-1962

ACE. CD/DL

Shelved debut of Ray Charles covers from folk rock originator.

In the early '60s, with producer Clyde Otis and arranger Bert Keyes, Jackie DeShannon recorded *Hits Of The Genius* for Liberty. Scheduled as her 1962 debut, it comprised covers of Ray Charles songs or songs associated with him, but when Bobby Darin put out his own *Sings Ray Charles* on Atco that same year, Liberty shelved it. Issued here for the first time, it captures a 20-something singer with a voice that's full of grit with the occasional crack, wholly inhabiting such standards as Hallelujah I Love Him So, What'd I Say and Night Time Is The Right Time. Better still though are her takes on his ballads, as she internalises the pain and sadness of I'll Drown In My Own Tears and Don't Let The Sun Catch You Crying to create emotional *coups de maître*.

Lois Wilson

Various

★★★★

Jon Savage's The Secret Public

ACE. CD/DL

Subtitled: How LGBTQ+ Resistance Shaped Popular Culture.

Celebrating the revolutionary impact of LGBTQ+ culture on mainstream pop, this thrilling 2-CD accompaniment to Jon Savage's expert book of the same name (see p36), is chock full of cultural milestones. Spanning 1955 to '79, it's also the sound of emancipation, chronologically bookended by Little Richard's Tutti Frutti, which fanfared the arrival of rock'n'roll in the form of a flamboyant black American bisexual, and Sylvester's I Need Somebody To Love Tonight, a bruised ballad by the first openly gay superstar. Also included are tracks that were played in the clubs or were shaped by the gay aesthetic: see the Motown floor-filler Needle In A Haystack by The Velvelettes and the tough resistance funk of Abaco Dream's Life And Death In G & A, a favourite at New York's Firehouse dances.

Lois Wilson

Greatest hits: King Of Soul Sam Cooke (left) with Cassius Clay recording The Gang's All Here, 1964.

That's heaven to me

Four-LP vinyl reissue of the 1994 set profiling the soul and gospel label co-owned by Sam Cooke. By Andrew Male.

Various

★★★★

Sam Cooke's SAR Records Story 1959-1965

ABKCO. DL/LP

BY SUMMER 1959, when Sam Cooke formed SAR Records with his road manager S Roy Crain and music publisher JW Alexander, he'd already been through the financial ringer courtesy of Specialty Records and the short-lived Keen label. With Specialty, the Mississippi-born Soul Stirrers' frontman and rising pop star was on a 0.5 per cent royalty that earned him $2,500 for every million records sold, and with the disorganised Keen set-up Cooke's unpaid royalties for chart-topping solo records, like 1957's You Send Me, were effectively keeping the label solvent. Cooke realised he could do a lot better both as a label boss and business manager. Plus, in his time at Specialty and Keen, the singer had grown in confidence and ability, writing more, picking up production skills and, most importantly, developing an in-the-studio manner that put other artists at ease.

The label's first signing was Cooke's own former gospel outfit The Soul Stirrers, recently dropped by Specialty and with a new singer, Johnnie Taylor. Their first session, included in its entirety here, is headed by the gorgeous Stand By Me Father. Written by Cooke, Alexander and Junior Parker, it is a significant, transitional track for songwriter Cooke, perfectly defining the SAR blend of gospel harmonies, torch song sentiments and pop-soul arrangements, with Taylor effortlessly emulating Cooke's sweet, pleading tenor. On other Stirrers tracks such as Wade In The Water and Oh Mary, Don't You Weep, you hear Cooke's in-the-studio chatter, coaxing better performances from the singers ("Give me a little bit more air between that 'Oh' and 'lookin' back', Jimmy!").

SAR's other major signing was Cleveland teenage gospel group The Womack Brothers, fronted by future soul star Bobby Womack, whom Cooke coached in phrasing and diction, transforming gospel numbers such as Somewhere There's A God and Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray into the rough-edged soul-pop numbers Somewhere There's A Girl and Lookin' For A Love. "We felt almost like we were making a mockery of God," Womack told Peter Guralnick, "[But] Sam was saying, 'Man, just don't be tense.'" That's what you hear in this collection, a genre's relaxed, easy transition from '50s gospel to '60s soul, yet one that retains the euphoric, communal uplift of the former.

Cooke himself never recorded for SAR but eventually released a bunch of unreleased Keen masters on the label and they're all available here, along with an intimate guitar-and-voice demo of his 1957 Number 1 hit, You Send Me. Other highlights include a protean incarnation of Johnnie Taylor's grits'n'guts Stax soul, and LC Cooke's waltzing cover of his brother's Put Me Down Easy, but of the 30-plus tracks assembled here there isn't a duff take and you have to wonder where Cooke would have taken this wonderful label next if his life hadn't been cut so brutally short on December 11, 1964, at the Hacienda Motel in South Central LA.

The Staple Singers

★★★★

Africa 80

OMNIVORE. CD/DL

Superb from-the-soundboard reissue of heavily bootlegged show.

This is soul music as liberation: The Staple Singers, present at the birth of gospel and at every major landmark in soul music during their life-span since, performing in Africa in 1980 to non-segregated audiences. Mavis Staples as always is the star, her rich contralto embodying both gravitas and joy over Roebuck 'Pops' Staples' funk guitar licks on a set comprising US folk ballads, pop and civil rights anthems. The hits, Respect Yourself and Come Go With Me, are testament to the group's sheer energy. He's Alright and Touch A Hand Make A Friend are exalted exhortations: the first named, a frenzy of affirmative whooping, hollering and clapping; the second sees Mavis channelling Dorothy Love Coates in a moment of utopian abandon.

Lois Wilson

Various

★★★★

Shotgun Boogie: Rhythm & Blues Goes Country Vol. 1

BEAR FAMILY. CD

Black musicians sing hillbilly and country material.

In 1950s America, rival versions of the same song often battled it out simultaneously in the Billboard charts – Joe Turner's original 1954 cut of Shake, Rattle & Roll, for example, quickly finding itself up against Bill Haley's version. The traffic wasn't all one way, however, and this CD showcases a selection of R&B and blues artists like Bull Moose Jackson, B.B. King or Wynonie Harris performing country material. Cecil Gant's 1951 two-fisted cover of Tennessee Ernie Ford's hillbilly smash Shotgun Boogie certainly hits the spot, while the versatile Scatman Crothers turns in a hugely entertaining take of much-covered western anthem Ghost Riders In The Sky. Oddly, less successful are the attempts at Hank Williams material, which ought to work but don't, yet the unlikely instance of LA vocal group royalty The Platters singing Merle Travis's Kentucky coal mining epic Sixteen Tons proves a nicely understated treat.

Max Décharné

Familie Hesselbach

★★★

Süddeutschland & Der Untergang Des Hauses H

PLAY LOUD! PRODUCTIONS. DL/LP

Eclectic final studio outing from band dubbed 'the German Talking Heads'.

Formed by a sextet of students from the University of Tübingen, Familie Hesselbach made a virtue of eclecticism. The mutant disco of this, their 1985 last stand, is dominated by two contrasting versions of Süddeutschland (one straight-up, one dub), a punk-funk fantasia whose joyous horns echo Pigbag, with a wayward sax solo worthy of the Blockheads' Davey Payne. Elsewhere, the driving, scratchy Rimini, gothy darkness of Susi and off-beam ska excursion Baden show a group not tethered to one style or language (songs are in Italian, German and English), as rhythmic shades of ESG slam into Gang Of Four's splintered guitars and James White-ish atonal skronk. Inevitably uneven, it thrills in dispatches.

Andy Cowan

Various

★★★★

Eccentric Soul Minibus

NUMERO GROUP. LP

Double album's worth of soul singles cherry-picked from 2012 limited-edition 45s box set, *Omnibus*.

An excavation of rare soul singles spanning 1966 to 1980 that collectively map soul music's evolution from the sidelines. The earliest cuts are by Two Plus Two and Majjestees, both with links to Motown. The first named – led by Wilburt Jackson, a songwriter for Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell – deliver I'm Sure, which sounds like it came straight off the Detroit production line. The second's Let Her Go is crushing harmony soul featuring Angelo Bond, who later joined HDH's Invictus/Hot Wax. The latest cut, 1980's A Friend by Washington DC trio Crystal's Image, is dancefloor-focused with a transportive piano break. Further highs come with 1976's Patience, empowerment disco funk by Roxx, who had connections with Barry White, and from the same year, Sky's The Limit's urban symphony Don't Be Afraid.

Lois Wilson

Getty

Azeri mettle: Rəhman Məmmədli and his psychedelic gitara; (top) with his band in the late '70s.

FILE UNDER...

Stinging lessons

Iron Curtain guitars trained to swarm and attack. By Jim Irvin.

LET US now praise Czechoslovakian guitars.

In the 1950s, electric guitars made by a Czech company called Resonet were steady sellers in the UK when American guitars weren't being allowed into the country. Resonet's 'Grazioso' model, styled on the Fender Stratocaster and marketed here as the Futurama, was a popular beginner's choice, with youngsters George Harrison, Jimmy Page and Eric Clapton supposedly among its satisfied customers. The British embargo on American imports was lifted in 1959, although it still took a while for them to show up and become affordable.

But in the communist bloc that never happened and Czech guitars continued to dominate, though Resonet gave way to the Jolana factory, which opened its doors in 1960 and was soon producing popular models called Tornado, Typhoon and Hurricane. These blew across the Caucasus and one, reaching the mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, landed in the hands of a young musician named Rafiq Hüseynov, AKA Rəmiş, who played the modal music known as mugham on a tar, a long-necked stringed instrument similar to a saz. Rəmiş's red gitara – as the electric instrument is known in Azerbaijan – became a celebrated beacon of cool, his particular model being a hollow-bodied instrument with a high action between the bridge and end-pin which gave him leeway to bend the strings with his wrist as he played, to summon the woozy quarter tones that mugham requires. His innovation inspired many new players, who adapted and tweaked their gitara to replicate traditional tones. This style effectively became a new genre in itself.

Rəhman Məmmədli, from the same mountain region as Rəmiş, introduced a fizzing distortion to his gitara in the late 1970s, which reminded listeners of some of Azerbaijan's more astringent traditional vocal styles, and earned him the nickname oxuyan barmağı, 'the one with the singing fingers'.

Azerbaijani musicians have tended not to make records as such, mostly playing live at weddings and gatherings, and recording cassettes and video tapes that get copied and passed around communities. However, the intrepid Swiss label Bongo Joe has gathered some rare recordings as *Rəhman Məmmədli – Azerbaijani Gitara Vol.2* ★★★★, for the second in their series exploring the bizarre joys of gitara.

It is an extraordinary noise, an acidic tone dialled up in all directions, not just distortion but an intense vibration with huge amounts of treble to emit a stinging sound that could loosen your dentistry, made all the more surprising by the fact that Məmmədli doesn't compose his own material, but is adapting traditional folk and mugham songs, giving them an attack that makes these old melodies and gentle fairy tales, suddenly, unexpectedly psychedelic, though that may not have been the intent at all.

"It's an extraordinary noise, an acidic tone dialled up in all directions..."

On opener Qoçaĺi the rapidly stuttering harmonics make it seem like the sound is about to escape, a swarm of something malevolent about to launch towards you. The more subdued Xar Bülbül apparently tells the story of a homesick princess, and here the gitara replicates the sound of longing in exile. Faster tunes can reach a furious pace. Leylican is like a Georgian wedding dance for speed freaks.

As you might imagine, the original Jolana guitars that inspired the sound have become increasingly hard to source. One gitara stalwart, Fikrət Quliyev, has consequently developed his own model called the Fitar that has found enthusiastic takers within the scene. I'd love to hear a Western rocker get hold of one of those. These days, Məmmədli, now 62, is teaching tar to school children in Fuzuli city. He has taken his gitara all over the world – Turkey, Iran, the US. There is footage of him playing his gitara at a recent American festival available on YouTube. As he conjures choirs of bees from his strings, little kids are dancing enthusiastically.

Sitara Ibrahimbayli

Margo Guryan

★★★★★

Words And Music

NUMERO GROUP. CD/DL/LP

Three-LP box set includes bonus 10-inch Chopsticks Variation, limited to 500 copies.

MARGO GURYAN shunned the spotlight, but the singer, pianist, songwriter is currently in vogue after her 1966 demo Why Do I Cry became an unexpected TikTok viral hit. This overview of her work, then, is incredibly timely. Being Numero, they've dug deep into the archive, with the set including 16 previously unissued cuts including eight from an April 1957 session featuring guitarist Stanley Silverman, bassist Nat Mucci and drummer Al Francis. These are vocal jazz numbers with a bossa nova feel and were put down two years before she went to Lenox School Of Jazz where she studied alongside Ornette Coleman. There are also five from 1966 that are exquisite Brill Building-styled pop. Four of these feature just Guryan on piano, her vocals akin to Carole King, but also suited to the baroque pop of her 1968 LP *Take A Picture*.

Lois Wilson

Crying game: Margo Guryan has her words set to music.

Royal Trux

★★★★

Twin Infinitives

FIRE. CD/DL/LP

Drug-frazzled couple's second LP of deconstructivist US post-hardcore remastered.

Jennifer Herrema and Neil Hagerty were emerging as an NYC alt-royal couple to rival Sonic Youth's Kim and Thurston when, in the pit of addiction circa 1989, they relocated to San Francisco and concocted this ultra-dark second album, whose disturbingly skeletal presentation challenged the accepted parameters of music. While Herrema worked as a stripper to fund both their habits, the pair recorded its 15 beginnings-of-songs on borrowed studio time across nine months, their primitive beats, oblivious riffing and impenetrable chants a window into their existential degradation. Yet, there's also futuristic Zen mystery within the primordial sonic soup: filling all of side three, (Edge Of The) Ape Oven summons a wondrously cosmic-but-claustrophobic beatbox groove, splashed with harmonica and Monk-ish piano. Even at 34 years' distance, *Twin Infinitives* makes 'difficult' benchmarks like Captain Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica* feel smooth, organised and people-pleasing. This 'remastering' helps clarify its extraordinary murk.

Andrew Perry

Can

★★★

Live In Aston 1977

MUTE. CD/DL/LP

Czukay, Karoli, Liebezeit & Schmidt's last UK tour: strange, but still potent.

After the tremendous *Paris 1973* set released in February, Damo Suzuki rampant, the fifth instalment of Mute's Can live series is a trickier sell. *Live In Aston 1977* catches the band on their last UK tour, ostensibly supporting that year's undervalued *Saw Delight*, with Rosko Gee on bass (but without his fellow Traffic alum Rebop Kwaku Baah, who'd also figured on the album). The kinetic interplay is still gripping, with Holger Czukay now improvising frictional electronics on one of his last jaunts with the band. An occasional reggaeish clip isn't always quite so successful, though, as the second of four jams here seems to take a phrase from Vitamin C and turn it into a kind of schlager-ska: fascinating, if not entirely essential. Odd sleevenotes, too, with Glen Matlock reminiscing about a Hammersmith Palais show three years earlier and eulogising Czukay's technique on the bass – an instrument, of course, that he doesn't touch on *Live In Aston 1977*.

John Mulvey

Jonathan Rosner

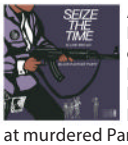
Elaine Brown

★★★★

Seize The Time: Black Panther Party

REAL GONE MUSIC. LP

1969 protest from BPP's only ever female chair.



After Black Panther Party chief of staff David Hilliard heard her sing Precious Lord at murdered Panther Bunchy Carter's funeral, he asked Elaine Brown, a singer and pianist originally from Philadelphia but living in LA and working as a community activist, to record an album to promote the Party's struggle. The resulting *Seize The Time* was lyrically loud and angry, delivered in a vocal-jazz style. Brown's voice – sharp, dramatic – sounds not unlike Nina Simone's, embodying the fight itself, and matched to intuitive backgrounds that combine folk, gospel, blues and classical. Arranged by avant-garde pianist Horace Tapscott and performed by his Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra, it peaks with The Meeting, a moving recollection of her first encounter with Eldridge Cleaver that became the Party's national anthem, but it all has lasting resonance.

Lois Wilson

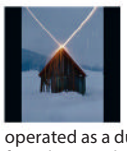
Gastr Del Sol

★★★★

We Have Dozens Of Titles

DRAG CITY. CD/DL/LP

Previously uncollected material from the 1993-98 output of this oblique and influential duo.



Initially a trio, when two-thirds went off to start Tortoise, Gastr Del Sol operated as a duo comprising founder David Grubbs and producer/sonic manipulator Jim O'Rourke, two restive musicians with a deliciously maverick view of their craft's requirements, plus assorted heavy friends. After recording their most successful and accessible album *Camoufleur* they – with not unexpected perversity – ceased trading. This handsomely appointed, wittily christened 3-LP/2-CD set gathers live recordings for CBC radio circa *Camoufleur* – drummerless, instrumental takes of The Seasons Reverse and Blues Subtitled No Sense Of Wonder – plus career-spanning, super-obscure EP tracks making their vinyl debut. Bracing end-of-shift horns conjure The Harp Factory On Lake Street, a side-long piano reverie. Much of the rest are duets for plangently off-centre solo guitar (or icy off-meds piano) and atmospheric disruption. Not ideal for newcomers, perhaps, but a recumbent feast for fans.

Jim Irvin

Various

★★★★

In The Beginning There Was Rhythm

SOUL JAZZ. CD/DL/LP

Remastered version of Soul Jazz's 2001 compilation of mutant disco and post-punk in the UK.

A connoisseur's dip into post-punk at its most clued-in and primal, the devil-may-care fusions captured here were a dancefloor-primed response to Thatcherism. The abrasive, anti-capitalist funk of Gang Of Four's To Hell With Poverty, The Pop Group's swaggering Maggie takedown She Is Beyond Good And Evil and 23 Skidoo's Coup, a barbed answer disc to Paul Hardcastle's 19, all radiate political invective. Elsewhere, Throbbing Gristle pave the ground for the industrial movement, A Certain Ratio hit their groove with an agitated cover of Banbarra's Shack Up, while This Heat's motorik repetitions and rattling percussion on 24 Track Loop set the controls for drum'n'bass. Abetted by equally influential efforts from The Slits, Cabaret Voltaire and The Human League, it's an excellent reminder of the breadth of experimentation then afoot.

Andy Cowan

Phil Pratt

★★★★

Star Wars Dub

BURNING SOUNDS. CD/DL/LP

Tough Channel One dubs, produced by Phil Pratt.

After a failed debut for Studio One and a handful of 45s for Caltone, singer-turned-producer Phil Pratt began a long residency at Channel One, building rhythms with Skin, Flesh & Bones and The Revolutionaries. Given limited release in 1978, *Star Wars Dub* concentrates on the core drum and bass of recent productions, with only a touch of delay in places. The pick of the bunch is Con Man, a bass-heavy reading of The Blackstones' Open The Gate with echoing guitar fragments, and Which Clapp is an adaptation of The Wailers' Screw Face with prominent brass refrains; King Sighta's Shining Star is stripped down to its keyboard-led fundamentals for the title track. Contrasting the excessive gimmickry of LPs such as *African Dub All-Mighty Chapter 3*, *Star Wars Dub* emphasises Sly Dunbar's invigorating drum patterns and the cleanness of the Channel One sound.

David Katz

Blowing off: Bent Wind (from left) Marty Roth, Sebastian Pelaia, Gerry Gibas and Eddie Thomas, 1969.

Stoned Gas

From rock obscuria's dumper: boxing-gloved, Stoogean lunacy from late-'60s Toronto.

Bent Wind
Sussex

TREND, 1969

CREDITS

Tracks: Sacred Cows/Riverside/ Mystify/Going To The City/Look At Love/ Hate/Touch Of Red/ The Lions

Personnel: Gerry Gibas (lead guitar, vocal), Marty Roth (rhythm guitar, vocal), Sebastian Pelaia (bass), Eddie Thomas (drums)

Producer: Merv Buchanan (also engineer)

Recorded: Trend Records Inc, Toronto, Canada

Released: October 1969

Chart peak: N/A

Current availability: Guerssen Records LP, 2023

ONE OF vintage psychedelia's most unhinged and highly valued long-players, *Sussex* by Bent Wind emanated from a low-life hippy hang-out at 75 Sussex Avenue in Toronto's university district. In the basement there in spring '69, shaggy-maned stoner Gerry Gibas was woodshedding with his rhythm section when nearby headshop proprietor Marty Roth popped in, and within minutes was filling in for the combo's absentee rhythm guitarist. For a few hours, they ran through Gibas's repertoire, but after their leader nipped upstairs for his supper, he returned to find the trio working on a Roth composition.

"Gerry plugged his guitar back in, turned his wah wah on, and before you knew it, we had another song happening," recalls Roth today from his home in Toronto. "After we'd finished, he looked up at me and said, 'It sounds like a bent wind… What else you got?' Gerry was a strange cat, that's why I loved hanging out with him."

Thus sorted for a band name, the quartet stumbled into life. When they played their fourth gig at a local catholic church on July 26, 1969, they were 'spotted' by Toronto entrepreneur Merv Buchanan, who signed them to his Trend imprint and recorded their British Invasion-like Sacred Cows for a single release.

Recorded in two hours with amateur Buchanan producing, Bent Wind's debut 45 was deemed un-broadcastable by Toronto radio. Soon after, Gibas, Roth, Sebastian Pelaia (bass) and Eddie Thomas (drums) were making an album with Buchanan again at the helm, with equally chaotic results.

"By then, we actually had a business card which said, 'Contemporary Blues Rock' on it," says Roth. "Maybe 75 per cent of our songs had harmonica, but Merv didn't want any of the bluesy stuff. We were just so happy that somebody actually wanted to make a record for us, we didn't care!"

"In hospital, they grafted part of Gerry's bum on the end of his finger."
MARTY ROTH

Sussex, named after their street of residence and released in October '69, ended up like a muffled missing link between The Yardbirds and proto-punks like the MC5 and The Stooges. Though they were just 250 miles away in Detroit, Roth says his group had never heard of the last two bands. Created in a clueless bubble, then, the album was the sound of a ham-fisted band barely six months old ripping through eight songs with amps on full in two days – a day apiece for music and vocals.

"People today often comment about how Gerry's style of playing lead was really wild," chuckles Roth. "Well, one time when we were all tripping on acid, he was reaching under a bed and somebody jumped on it so it collapsed and chopped off the top of his finger. In hospital, they grafted part of his bum on the end of his finger, but it was so tender he could only use the other three fingers to play with."

Perhaps that manual disfigurement, as with Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi, gave an edge to Gibas's hastily reinvented playing technique.

Also on the hoof, many of *Sussex*'s lyrics were written in the studio to replace the reverbed-up non-verbal moans they'd previously used. The Roth-penned Hate offers an angrily incoherent, Monks-esque response to the Vietnam war, while The Lions celebrates that hippy rental house at 57 Sussex, where the band by now all cohabited. Its celebration of cannabis smoking – and the plaster-moulded red ape called Leroy which became the band's mascot – predate stoner benchmarks like Sleep's *Dopesmoker* by a full two decades. Other details, like the bird whistle which signals the killing in murder ballad Riverside, only add to the album's sense of derangement.

It was not to be embraced by the wider listening world. After Sacred Cows flopped, *Sussex* garnered a tentative pressing of 300 copies but was again knocked back by radio DJs who found it too hissy for broadcast. "At that point, we went back to 57 Sussex and started using the remaining copies as frisbees," says Roth, "just threw them around like they were garbage."

With so few copies in existence, prices quickly escalated upon the album's later discovery by psych prospectors. Roth learnt of this development circa 1983, when he'd opened a new head shop and a dealer expressed horror at his last irreparable copy "literally nailed to the wall."

At that point, in a rare outbreak of a Bent Wind member choosing wisely, Roth purchased a copy. "I couldn't believe I'd bought my own album for $200," he laughs, "but after that the value seemed to go up every year." By 2018, a Trend original reputedly changed hands for $8,000: an original has never turned up on Discogs.

In the interim, following the band's split in spring 1970, there'd been efforts to re-form, though Gibas was "too messed up". Roth marshalled fresh line-ups from 1989 to '96, but stayed close with his old co-leader. They occasionally made music together as Lion until Covid claimed Gibas in 2020.

"You've heard about the one-hit-wonders," Roth summarises. "Well, we were the no-hit-wonders, who somehow got known eventually. But we never planned to get rich from this, so it's all good."

Andrew Perry

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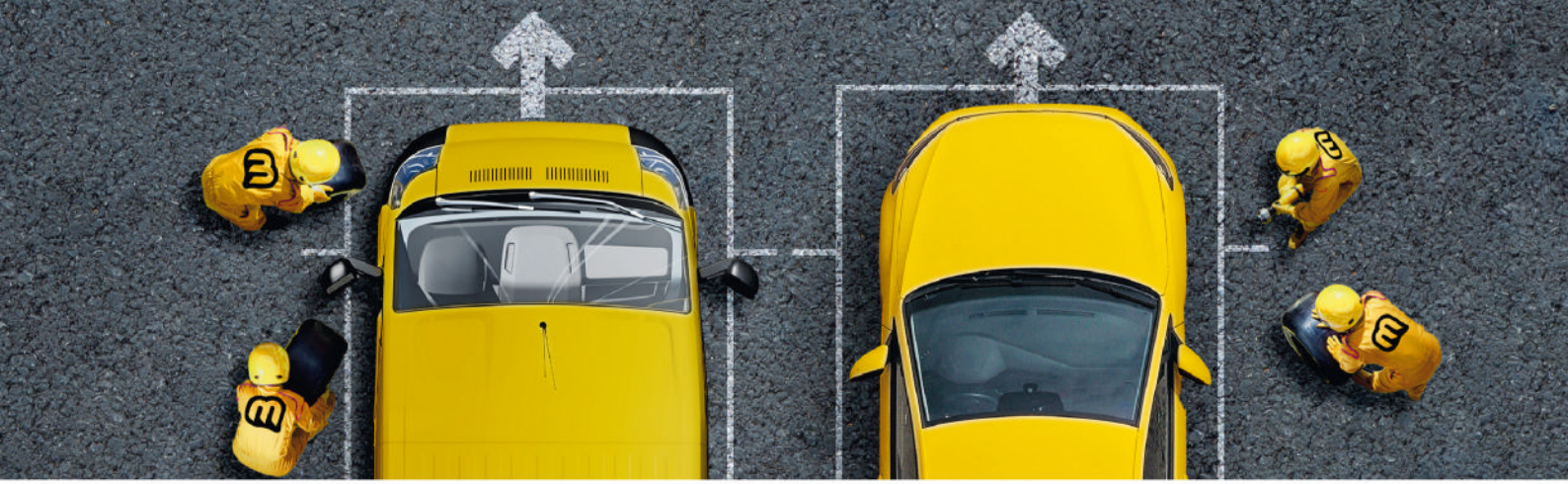

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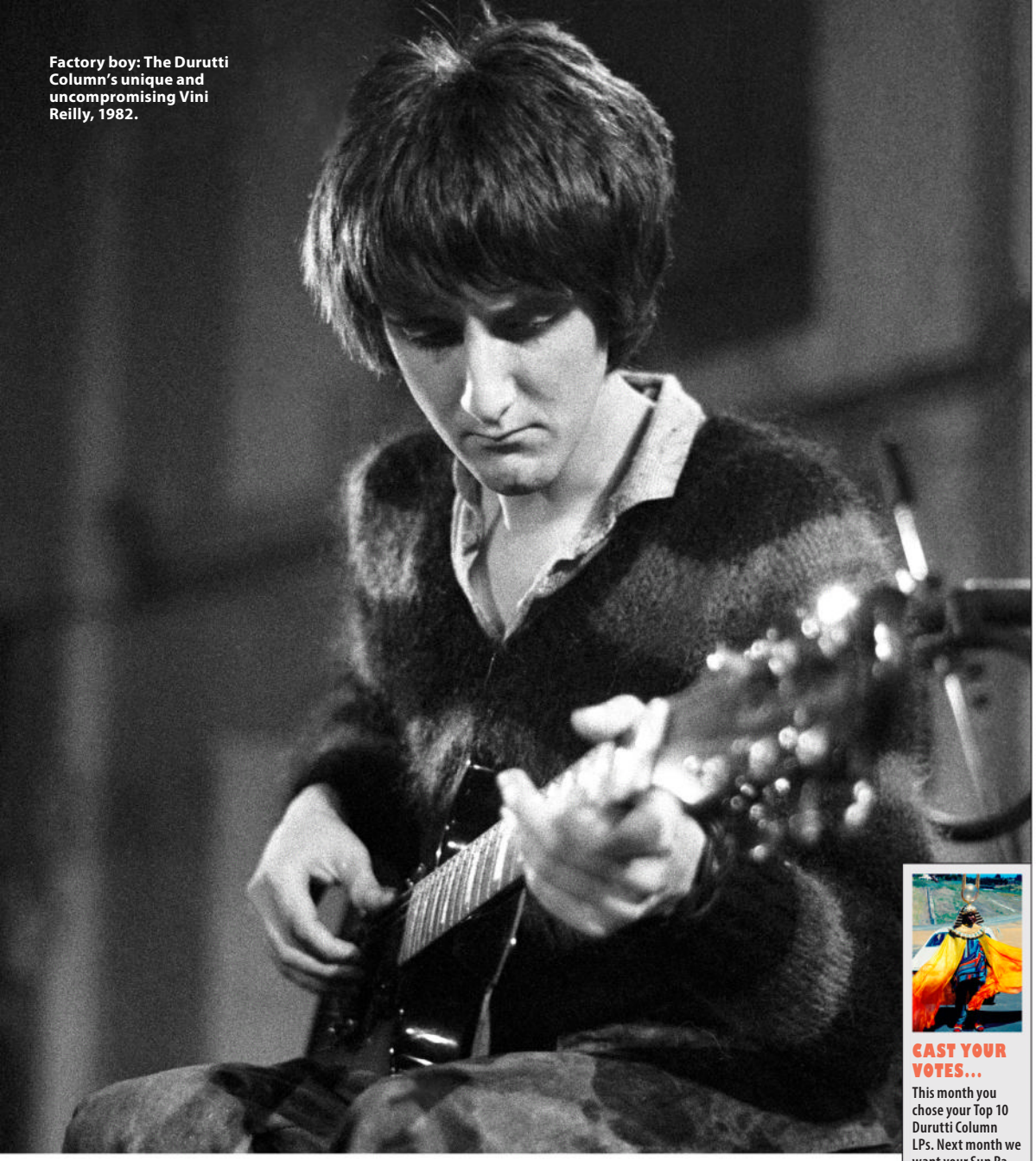


Factory boy: The Durutti Column's unique and uncompromising Vini Reilly, 1982.

David Corio/Getty, Alamy

The Durutti Column

Factory Records' other legendary group. By Ian Harrison.

IN JANUARY 1979, The Durutti Column's vinyl debut on the A Factory Sample EP presented full-band, post-punk awkwardness dominated by thespish vocalist Colin Sharp. One year on, with only guitarist Vini Reilly remaining, revelatory instrumental long-player *The Return Of The Durutti Column* was a sudden teleport to an entirely different realm of imagination, feeling and sensation. A unique and uncompromising 30 years of music had begun.

Reilly's own beginnings were in south Manchester, where he was born in 1953. He was raised in a pop-and-TV-free, but jazz, classical and opera-rich, household. Musically adept from a young age, and struck young by Albatross and *Abbey Road*, early endeavours included a spell in Wythenshawe punks Ed Banger And The Nosebleeds. After he found his vehicle, and assisted by his dauntless friend, confidante and percussionist Bruce Mitchell, the following decades saw explorations into avant-rock, chamber music, flamenco, programmed dance tracks and sampling, with Reilly's acutely emotive, finger-picked guitar always at centre. Empowered by the patience and patronage of his manager, Factory Records boss Tony Wilson, Reilly was never a popular choice and had more success playing on recordings by Morrissey, Holly Johnson and John Cooper Clarke. Admirers still place his music alongside the hypnagogic likes of Talk Talk or Arthur Russell in terms of its otherworldly grace and power.

Throughout, Reilly had contended with ill-health and recalled being medicated and threatened with being sectioned 12 times in 1979 alone. Beginning in 2010, he suffered three strokes which, he says, made it impossible for him to play. An informal YouTube clip from 2020 of him unwinding a typically Durutti-esque extemporisation, however, sparked hopes that there may yet be more. Such a return from a seemingly impossible place would befit this doughty, inspirational figure. "You can't separate your creative process from your life," he told this writer in 2006. "My life's determined my music and my music's determined my life."

"Reilly's acutely emotive, finger-picked guitar is always at the centre."

CAST YOUR VOTES...

This month you chose your Top 10 Durutti Column LPs. Next month we want your Sun Ra Top 10. Send selections via X, Facebook, Instagram or e-mail to mojo@bauermedia.co.uk with the subject 'How To Buy Sun Ra' and we'll print the best comments.

10 The Durutti Column

Time Was Gigantic... When We Were Kids

FACTORY TOO, 1998

You say: "The best of his 'song' albums... heartfelt, sometimes brutally so." Tim Worth, via e-mail

Reilly had been hit with a huge tax demand and his 20-year association with Wilson was soon to end. Despite all that, this ruefully titled final album of the '90s features some truly honeyed-sounding recordings. Vocalist Eley Rudge, whose voice is not far from Harriet Wheeler of The Sundays, sings on the easy-come I B Yours and five more songs. There are other, graver presentiments, as on the betrayed Drinking Song and Abuse. Pigeon, meanwhile, is Reilly's shimmering homage to Fleetwood Mac's Albatross, a song which floored him as a kid. For those besotted, 2001's follow-up *Rebellion* explores similar ground, down to Reilly's penchant for tablas.

4 The Durutti Column

A Paean To Wilson

KOOKY, 2010

You say: "Ranging from his glissando guitar, sampling, folk, experimental and more, Reilly's tribute to his friend is touching and heartfelt." @dbsweeney, via X

The sleeve image is Wilson and Reilly duetting at the piano on the opening night of Factory's club the Haçienda in 1982: stains from a thrown cake were photoshopped off Wilson's suit jacket. Reilly's tribute to his former manager, label boss and friend has no such filter, but while the funereal Chant and Requiem betray depths of despair, elsewhere sentiments are tender, as when a bold sample of Marvin Gaye resounds on the Vangelis-esque Brother. Wilson appears twice, as an introductory loop from an interview with Hannett, and later when he was dying, observing how wealth inequality increased under the Blair government on the furious How Unbelievable.

9 The Durutti Column
Sunlight To Blue… Blue To Blackness

KOOKY, 2008

You say: "An outstanding late-period LP… God was right when he said 'it's good music to chill out to' in the 24 Hour Party People film." Michael O'Neill, via e-mail

Recent LPs had favoured group arrangements and vocals, but here Reilly and Mitchell returned to a stripped-back guitar/percussion palette. Years fall away as he bends strings and softens the corners of reality, poignantly revisiting songs from *LC* and 1984's *Without Mercy*, as if he knew time was running out: on So Many Crumbs And Monkeys! he sighs, "I'm a leaf on a windy day/Pretty soon I'll be blown away." Poppy Morgan's piano reflection Ananda, meanwhile, reminds you how much simpatico outside players brought to DC: Reilly apologised for his contributions to the song on a sleevenote.

8 The Durutti Column
Circuses And Bread

FACTORY, 1986

You say: "An out of this world masterpiece… transporting the listeners into and guiding them through a labyrinth of sound." DJ Space Terrapin, via X

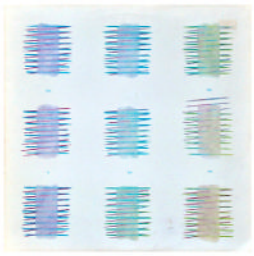
This focused set brought no drastic surprises – rarely the Durutti way – but instead moved further into the modern classical zone with the electric guitar firmly in mind. The drama is both subtle and overt: with its dubbed gunfire, the elegiac Street Fight is an exorcism for the underworld (Reilly has recalled having a gun pointed at him in his own criminal-adjacent years) while Royal Infirmary magically paints with light in ways not unlike *Another Green World*, and almost boogies. Side two contains three longer pieces, with closing 10-minute suspension Blind Elevator Girl – Osaka jazzily looking forward to the *Vini Reilly* LP.

7 The Durutti Column
Short Stories For Pauline

FACTORY BENELUX, 2012

You say: "A long-unheard early peak… enough to make you wish DC just carried on like this forever." D. Nicholls, via e-mail

Recorded one November '83 day in Brussels for Factory's associate label in Europe, this LP's Duet was a beauteous piece for piano and ex-Tuxedomoon man Blaine L. Reininger's viola. It drove Wilson to make a rare A&R intervention. Scrapping the LP, he encouraged Reilly to instead make 1984's Keats-inspired *Without Mercy* (that LP was memorably advertised in NME with: 'The Durutti Column Piss On The Art Of Noise'). Still, these stripped guitar and drums tracks, dedicated to Reilly's girlfriend Pauline Harrison, seem infused with vital Durutti essence, hitting the reverie dream state on Take Some Time Out and A Room In Southport.



6 The Durutti Column
Another Setting

FACTORY, 1983

You say: "The balance between the early beauty and expanding his sound. Consistently high quality from song to song." Bob Underwood, via Facebook

By this time, Reilly was a patient of psychiatrist Sydney Gottlieb, who had previously treated Ronnie Scott, Spike Milligan and Peter Cook. This may account for the sense of balance in evidence on Durutti's third: opening with electric piano and the cor anglais of Maunagh Fleming on the gently stark Prayer, here the group moved towards modern classical minimalism: A Certain Ratio's Simon Topping plays trumpet on The Beggar, a Streets Of London for the post-punk generation, while the chilling, sub-aqua Smile In The Crowd plumbs depths of alienation (it was later covered by Martin Gore). Inevitably, Reilly later said he wanted to forget the LP completely.

5 The Durutti Column
The Guitar And Other Machines

FACTORY, 1987

You say: "Captured everything great about the new and old DC. Forms a great trio of end-stage Factory LPs, but *Guitars* is the one." Chris Zenarcade, via Facebook

Armed with a DMX drum machine and a sequencer, Reilly was now removed from the pale invalid of popular perception: opener Arpeggiator pounds, but leavened with John Metcalfe's viola, this remains an arena of delicacy and emotive precision. One of producer Stephen Street's tasks was to persuade Reilly that the first take wasn't necessarily the best, and the starry-eyed What Is It To Me (Woman), the trumpet, drum and guitar-duelling When The World and the synth/chamber pop synthesis of Bordeaux Sequence all benefit.

3 The Durutti Column
Vini Reilly

FACTORY, 1989

You say: "The sound of a wallflower demanding their time in the sun… Otis is DC's most gorgeous song, but every track shows Reilly baring his soul… a masterpiece." John Mullen, via e-mail

Having just played on Morrissey's *Viva Hate*, Reilly's stock was high, and the title and his wish to finally appear on a sleeve suggested this was a moment of commercial chance. Listen to it now, and it really could have happened. Using an Akai S500 sampler and voices including Otis Redding, Tracy Chapman, opera singer Joan Sutherland and Annie Lennox (all used without permission), the gamut of acoustic/electronic Durutti styles are explored, with sun-kissed coast ride Otis balancing joy and pain and Finding The Sea a nine-minute multi-part travelogue.

2 The Durutti Column
The Return Of The Durutti Column

FACTORY, 1980

You say: "Vini plays the guitar and Martin Hannett plays the studio to create a *sui generis* sound." Josh M. Slifkin, Facebook

Famously released with a sandpaper sleeve, this key Factory artefact and departure from post-punk certainties began with the electronic twittering birds of the transcendent Sketch For Summer. Producer Martin Hannett's influence is tangible on this sustained mood-piece with drum machines, with Reilly as melancholic jazz guitarist on Katharine and the aptly named Jazz. Recorded during a period of depression, it's poignant in other ways: it was a favourite of Deborah Curtis when she believed her marriage to Joy Division singer Ian was saved, and in 2007 Tony Wilson's coffin entered Manchester's St Mary's church to Sketch For Summer.

The Durutti Column
LC

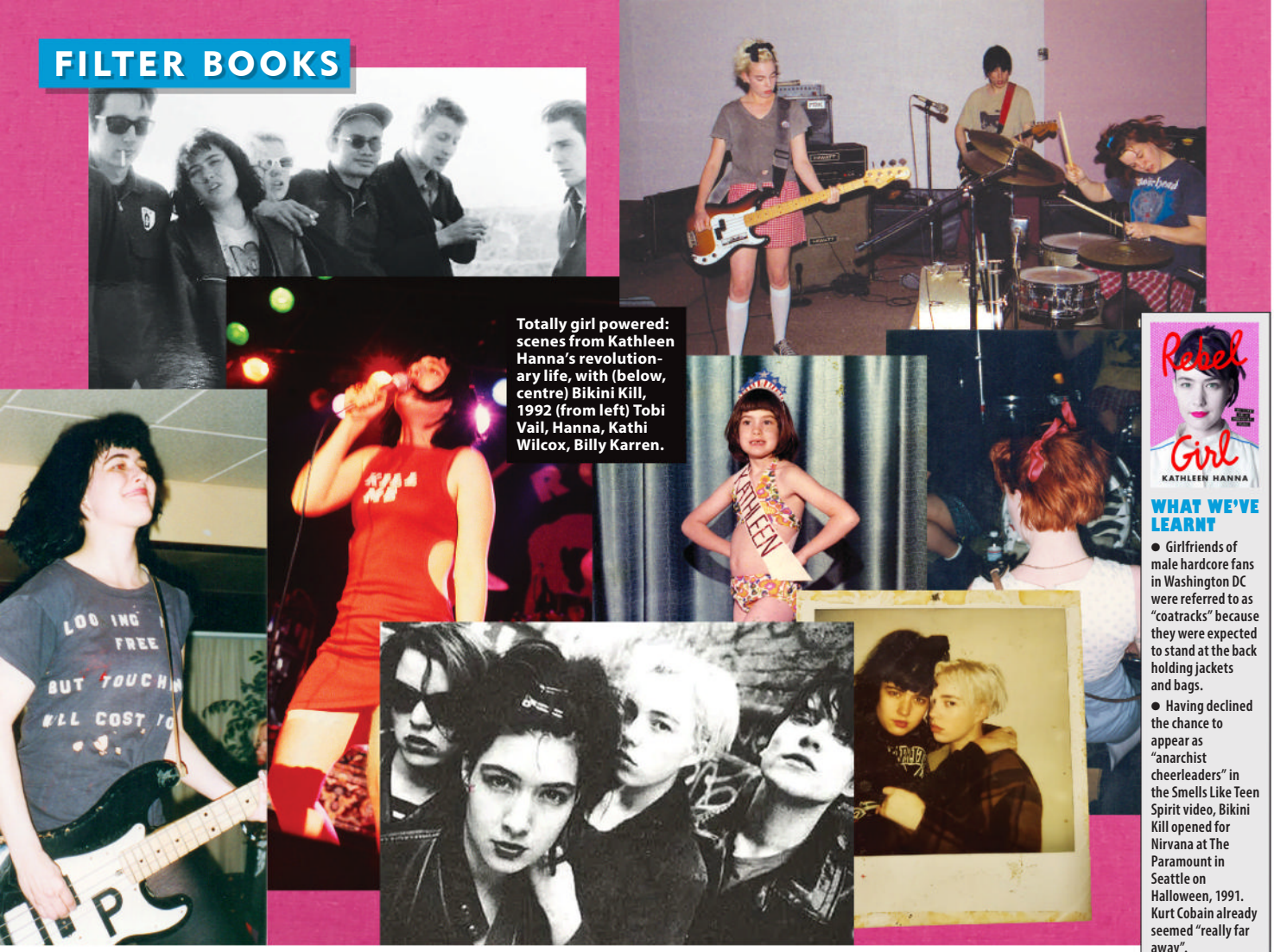
FACTORY, 1981

You say: "The combination of the guitar and percussion really struck me. I cannot really put forward any other DC record besides it." Hans Lindskog, MOJO Facebook

Standing for the Latin phrase Lotta Continua, or the Struggle Continues, *LC* remains the Durutti statement of intent. Nearly two years on from *The Return Of…*, Reilly had found completeness with the arrival of Mitchell, late of comedic Manc-rockers Albertos Y Lost Trios Paranoias. Here, his rolling, jazz-leaning rhythms stay close to Reilly's harmonic patterns for guitar, piano and Roland Space Echo: standouts include the beatific Jacqueline, a homage to Mitchell's wife and brief Durutti bassist who painted the LP's watercolour sleeve, and The Missing Boy, a lament for Ian Curtis. A transporting synthesis of emotion, intellect and physicality, Reilly recalled writing it in one night after exposure to Bartók: it was also the first time Vini sang, something Wilson discouraged him from doing.

NOW DIG THIS

Every Durutti album has something worth hearing on it. The New Order-inspired *Obey The Time* (above, Factory, 1990) finds Reilly re-imagining club music in his own image, and he actually admitted he quite liked *Keep Breathing* (Artful, 2006) rather than dismissing it as rubbish, as usual. Three volumes of *The Sporadic Recordings* (various labels) collect rare tracks, and digital release *At Twilight* collects early non-LP material: live albums include Tokyo gig *Domo Arigato* (Factory, 1985), a film of which is also available. For a written companion, the excellent history A Life Of Reilly by Factory scholar James Nice is available via burningshed.com.



Totally girl powered: scenes from Kathleen Hanna's revolutionary life, with (below, centre) Bikini Kill, 1992 (from left) Tobi Vail, Hanna, Kathi Wilcox, Billy Karren.

Courtesy of William Collins

Anger is an energy

The revolutionary life and times of a Riot Grrrl instigator. By Victoria Segal.

Rebel Girl: My Life As A Feminist Punk

★★★★

Kathleen Hanna

WILLIAM COLLINS. £20

MANY WOMEN will recognise Kathleen Hanna's description of sitting alone with a book in a café, only to have a man ask, "Whatcha reading?" They might empathise, too, with the image of dancing at a gig before unwanted attention spoils the fun. Sexism, argues the Bikini Kill singer (later of The Julie Ruin and Le Tigre), drives women from public life: why not avoid hassle by staying home? When Hanna yelled "girls to the front!" during her band's early-'90s shows, it was about reclaiming that space, stopping women being pushed back inside.

Titled after Bikini Kill's defining call-to-arms, Rebel Girl puts Hanna's experiences firmly front and centre. With Kurt Cobain, Joan Jett, Kathy Acker and Andrea Dworkin all featuring, it's a multiple-threat of a book: a stinging coming-of-age story, a memoir of male violence, a poignant history of how grunge and riot grrrl were propelled from punk houses and art-spaces into the treacherous mainstream. "It's about the things that shaped me," writes Hanna. "The things that keep me up at night re-checking the locks on the doors." The chapters about her family – her off-the-rails sister, a father who terrorised his daughter with both a shotgun and his unsettling sexual behaviour – are blistering, each one a fierce short story. Outside is even less safe: Hanna writes courageously about her experiences of rape, as well as the toxic high school boyfriends, the kerb crawlers, an exhausting proliferation of creeps.

At college in Olympia, she turns anger into art and activism. Zine culture is in full inky flow; a barrette-wearing Joe Orton, she slips feminist messages into Judy Blume library books. She writes poetry, until Kathy Acker tells her audiences go for a smoke during spoken-word performances and she should join a band. She eventually forms Bikini Kill with fellow Fugazi and Babes In Toyland fans Tobi Vail and Kathi Wilcox, spearheading the Riot Grrrl movement. The notoriety is sudden and smothering: a media blackout can't stop the press, the heckling, the bomb threats.

Her pungent memories of the DIY lifestyle – bad vans, worse mattresses – belong to a vanishing world, the fragility emphasised by her tender pre-fame friendship with Cobain. There's an intense rendition of a grunge origin myth: after vandalising a "fake abortion clinic", Hanna and Cobain drunkenly wreck his bedroom. On the walls, she scrawls, "Kurt is the keeper of the kennel… Kurt smells like Teen Spirit". When he asks to use the line, it seems like "no big deal".

No deal was bigger, though. Hanna recalls dancing to Smells Like Teen Spirit in the strip joint where she worked (Fugazi's Ian MacKaye expressed concern about her job), feeling the disconnect between Nirvana's trajectory and her life. Cobain's tragedy hangs heavy over the whole scene, while Courtney Love later "cold-cocks" Hanna at a festival. Yet for all the '90s music press set pieces, this book is as much about being a woman in the world as a girl in a band, Hanna writing vividly about bad sex, good sex, falling in love, abortion, miscarriage, adoption, her struggle with Lyme disease. In a zine made after Cobain died, she hailed "the heroes that don't die at the end of the movie." Rebel Girl is the story of a survivor, but also an agitator, an instigator, a catalyst. "Whatcha reading?" Here's a hell of a reply.

"Rebel Girl is the story of a survivor, but also an agitator, an instigator, a catalyst."

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

- Girlfriends of male hardcore fans in Washington DC were referred to as "coatracks" because they were expected to stand at the back holding jackets and bags.
- Having declined the chance to appear as "anarchist cheerleaders" in the Smells Like Teen Spirit video, Bikini Kill opened for Nirvana at The Paramount in Seattle on Halloween, 1991. Kurt Cobain already seemed "really far away".
- Joan Jett and her manager Kenny Laguna became Hanna's "new dysfunctional family" after the former Runaway produced Bikini Kill's songs Demirep, New Radio and a re-recorded Rebel Girl in 1993. "Unlike my real family," writes Hanna, "they were dysfunctional in a fun way."
- Hanna was so besotted with future husband Beastie Boy Adam 'Ad-Rock' Horovitz she would kiss a poster of him before they got together. He later asked why his mouth was so smudged; she said she had spilled water on it.

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Through The Crack In The Wall: The Secret History Of Josef K

★★★★

Johnnie Johnstone

JAWBONE. £16.95

Biography of Postcard Records' avant-groove faction.

Josef K were named after a Kafka antihero, while two of the band grew up on Edinburgh's Camus Avenue. This book has several such fascinating asides, as when frontman Paul Haig is record shopping on the Scottish capital's Thistle Street, acquiring "*Diamond Dogs* and a hot pie for £1.50". This band's lifetime was brief and their sole album a thwarted affair. Yet Josef K's *The Only Fun In Town* in 1981 was the sole Postcard album in the label's initial lifetime – and there was posthumous validation when, 20-odd years on, Franz Ferdinand alchemised that LP's terse locomotion into chart-bound sounds. The haunting air of chances missed is foreshadowed when a teenage Haig lacks tickets for a Roxy Music show but glimpses their limousine from an Edinburgh double-decker, while the appeal of Josef K's cult clangour is underlined by the book's committed tone, a foreword from Stewart Lee and commentary from Ian Rankin, Simon Reynolds and Jon Savage.

Roy Wilkinson

Unapologetic Expression: The Inside Story Of The UK Jazz Explosion

★★★★

André Marmot

FABER. £25

Polemical inside story of the London jazz scene's recent renaissance.

Experience on the ground can be a blessing or a curse in the chronicling of a scene. Happily Marmot's two decades working as a live agent, promoter, label owner and occasional percussionist have given him resources to draw upon rather than scores to settle. And with its punchy yet nuanced historical perspective and extensive interviews with key players – from young lions Shabaka Hutchings and Cassie Kinoshi through illustrious forefathers Cleveland Watkiss and Courtney Pine back to veteran DJ evangelists Gilles Peterson and (a surprise but valid inclusion) Chris Hill – Unapologetic Expression's account of the recent British jazz upsurge is as authoritative and compulsively readable as Dan Charnas' landmark hip-hop study The Big Payback. While appreciating Marmot's protective stance towards his contributors, I'd also like to read an unexpurgated version containing the "more provocative" comments that interviewees were allowed to redact.

Ben Thompson

Depeche Mode: Vince

★★★

Simon Spence

BACK STAGE. £15

Repointed account of Basildon synth-pop masters' early years.

Vince Clarke left Depeche Mode in 1981, but for writer Simon Spence he left an indelible mark on the "Essex Joy Division". In this loving dissection of the band's early years (originally published in 2011), Spence takes the reader on such a thorough trip through their Basildon home the tourist board should grant him a blue badge. Yet Depeche Mode's new town birthplace resonates deeply with their initially smooth-cheeked modernist synth-pop and Spence smartly shows how they hatched from a landscape of comprehensive education, Methodist youth groups, borstal and youth unemployment. For Mute's Daniel Miller, they were "real life Silicon Teens"; Spence fleshes out the fantasy. Clarke, meanwhile, wrote I Sometimes Wish I Was Dead, was especially annoyed by his bandmates never giving him petrol money, and quit just after the release of their debut *Speak And Spell*, having ironically had enough. New life awaited.

Victoria Segal

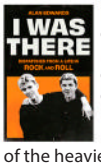
I Was There: Dispatches From A Life In Rock And Roll

★★★★

Alan Edwards

SIMON & SCHUSTER. £25

Highly readable memoir by the music publicist who worked with Bowie, Prince, Amy and more.



By one of his estimates, Alan Edwards's contacts book contains over 10,000 names. By another, one of the heaviest-hitting music and celebrity public relations operatives was amongst the Top 10 most phone-hacked people in Britain. Why, following one of his great rivals, Barbara Charone, he's gone down the memoir route is unclear. Spill secrets and the house is blown up; say nothing and it's another press release. But there's a third way for "a power broker, working in the shadows, unseen but influential". The man who knows where the bones are buried has encased them in another layer of concrete, so nobody is exposed, although Robert Plant and Victoria Beckham seem like fairly hard work. But he's a master of page-turning readability, and what he does reveal is an insider's view of operating inside the world of David Bowie, Michael Jackson, Amy Winehouse, Paul McCartney and a gaggle of A+ listers.

John Aizlewood

Searching For Dexys Midnight Runners

★★★

Nige Tassell

NINE EIGHT. £22

Hugely readable glimpse into the lives of those who made Dexys.

Here the Whatever Happened To The C86 Kids? author tracks down key players in Dexys' combustible history. Focusing on the 1980-85 period when the group issued their unimpeachable run of albums – *Searching For The Young Soul Rebels*, *Too-Rye-Ay* and *Don't Stand Me Down* – it begins on a downer: Kevin Archer, Kevin Rowland's erstwhile co-helm, giving away copies of his post-Dexys outfit Blue Ox Babes' lost LP *Apples & Oranges*, its folky pop sound a now acknowledged influence on the aforesaid *Too-Rye-Ay*. Archer declined to be interviewed, as does Rowland, but it's as much about the hunt as the capture, and Tassell has more success with the likes of Pete Williams, Jimmy Paterson and Mick Talbot, the first-named an avuncular raconteur and great on the intensity of the early soul revue days; Talbot, meanwhile, provides an illuminating compare-and-contrast of Rowland with Weller in The Style Council.

Lois Wilson

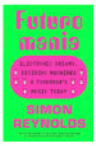
Futuromania

★★★★

Simon Reynolds

WHITE RABBIT. £25

Prolific music writer strives to memorialise the shock of the new.



Reynolds' first book since 2016's monumental but patchy glam history Shock & Awe is a back-to-basics journalistic selection, subtitled 'Electronic Dreams, Desiring Machines & Tomorrow's Music Today'. The common thread is the author's visceral attachment to music that feels (or, at least once felt) ahead of its time, but the prevailing mood is paradoxically backward-looking, partly as a result of the material's diverse provenance – a short 1994 review of three even then slightly antique dub albums rubs shoulders with a 2009 piece on the BBC4 documentary Synth Britannia and a more detailed tribute to the Yellow Magic Orchestra and Ryuichi Sakamoto, written just last year – but mainly because the dominant emotional tone is one of nostalgia for the excitement the elusive quality of "futuristicness" once inspired in his younger self. The book's undoubted highlight, Reynolds' terrific 32-page mini-history of Auto-Tune, flips this slightly maudlin script in fine style – read it and you will believe he believes in life after love.

Ben Thompson

BowieOdyssey74

★★★★

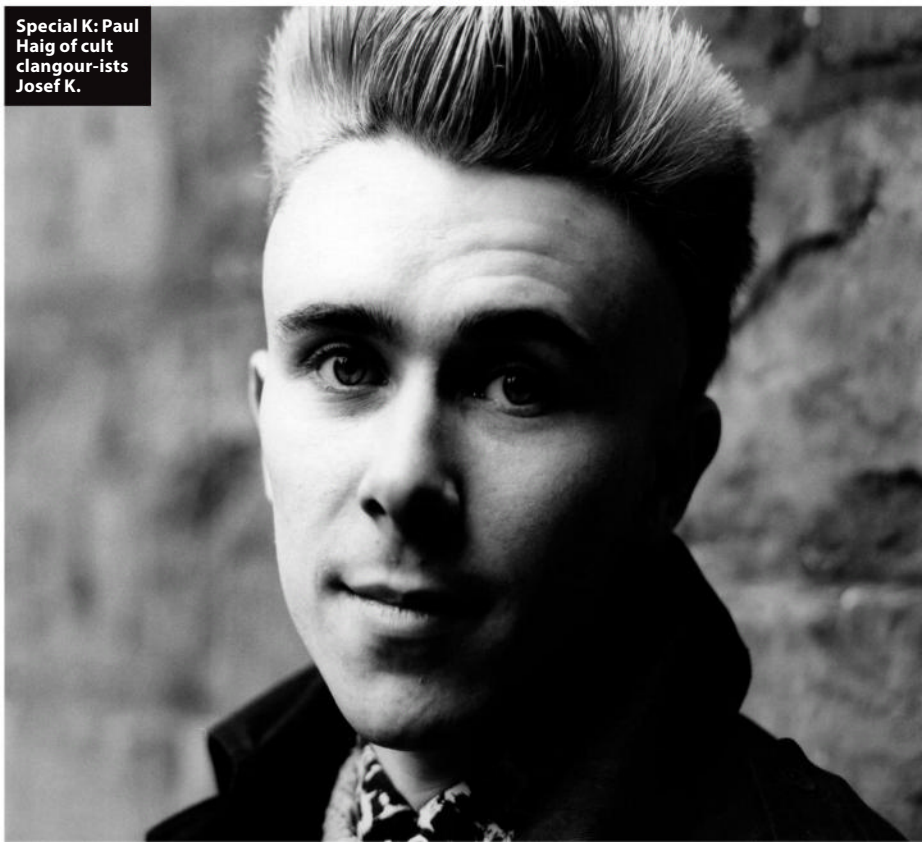
Simon Goddard

OMNIBUS PRESS. £16.99

Another year, another triumph for the author's vivid, provocative meditation on Bowie's '70s.

Now midway through his series on Bowie's brightest, bleakest, most brilliant decade, Goddard hits 1974 – the year of "One Bowie, three Davids, Black Stardust, White Soul". That's a lot to pack in. Once again, the novelistic, mostly episodic narrative brings everything alive. On the rebound from seeing his grand project based on Orwell's dystopian novel 1984 rejected by the author's estate, the impulsive Bowie is thoroughly convincing. Coked up and forever fixated on the world's imminent end, he journeys from "kung fu Britain" to "mirror ball" USA with a cast of well-drawn characters: manager "Colonel Tony", "the efficient woman" PA Corinne 'Coco' Schwab, "Johnny Beatle" Lennon and the "drones" who back him. There are exorcisms, the death of a girl at a David Cassidy concert, an imaginary conversation with Marc Bolan and the cautionary tale of the Stardust film. Almost hallucinatory in the telling, this book, like its predecessors, is unputdownable.

Mark Paytress



Special K: Paul Haig of cult clangour-ists Josef K.

Getty

Sky's the limit: the Fabs prepare to perform on the roof of Apple headquarters, January 30, 1969; (insets) the band during the Twickenham rehearsals.

Ethan Russell/Apple

Gimme some roof

The much-bootlegged Beatles coda, restored and officially returned to the screen. By Tom Doyle.

Let It Be

★★★★

Dir. Michael Lindsay-Hogg

DISNEY+. S

LET IT BE, the film, was always a strange epilogue to The Beatles' career, and one that they immediately disowned. None of the four turned up at any of its three premieres, held in May 1970 in New York, Liverpool and London, the latter nonetheless attracting the likes of Spike Milligan and Lulu plus exes Jane Asher and Cynthia Lennon. Only a month after the Daily Mirror ran the screaming front page headline, "Paul Is Quitting The Beatles", emotions within the camp remained understandably raw.

Since then, the documentary has undergone a weird afterlife: released on video tape and LaserDisc in the early '80s; revisited in 1992 ahead of parts of it being used in the Anthology TV series, with a DVD release mooted and then scrapped in the mid '90s, and again in the late '00s. McCartney and Starr, it seemed, were not keen to remind a global audience of a time when The Beatles were bickering.

All of that changed with the arrival of director Peter Jackson and his extensive upgrading and positive spin re-imagining of the footage for the near-eight-hour-long Get Back. Now, likely as a thank you to Let It Be director Michael Lindsay-Hogg, Jackson has been involved in this new, sanctioned restoration of the film, which employs the same audio and visual technology, while remaining free of the digital post-production techniques that made certain sections of Get Back look alien and odd. Lindsay-Hogg insisted that this new version retain its cinematic quality and hopes that it will now be "embraced for [its] curious and fascinating character".

Of course, post-Get Back, we're now viewing Let It Be through a different lens. If there was any sense that Lindsay-Hogg edited the original for ultimate dramatic effect, we now know that he chose – or was advised – to leave on the cutting room floor the scene where Harrison walks out of the band during the Twickenham rehearsals.

In his version, though, Yoko Ono seemed to get a rougher deal – depicted within the first few minutes as an unsmiling interloper plonked amid the Fabs, gazing adoringly at John as the band run through Don't Let Me Down. Later, in a Two Of Us try-out where Paul does his Elvis impersonation and John goofs with his guitar, the scene cuts to Ono looking morose, as if she isn't happy at all about this laddish camaraderie. Once again, we're now aware that a key scene where Ono and the soon-to-be Linda McCartney are seen smiling and amiably whispering while The Beatles play Let It Be was similarly scrapped.

If Let It Be sometimes lacked balance, it's also interesting to see how it was largely context-free. The action cuts from Twickenham to Savile Row to rooftop without any explanation whatsoever, and even the scenes of the policemen nervously arriving at Apple to stop the show is rendered dialogue-free, as the band hammer through Dig A Pony. Nonetheless, watching The Beatles, after days and weeks of scrappy rehearsal, suddenly turn it on for an audience is still genuinely startling, even without Jackson's hours of build-up.

And so, messy document that it was and is, Let It Be remains a compelling watch and now looks and sounds better than ever, particularly for those who've only ever witnessed it in scratchy, bootlegged form. In the end, much like the *Let It Be/Let It Be… Naked/Get Back* versions of the audio material, it's a welcome addition to the official canon, and viewers can now simply take their pick.

"Watching The Beatles suddenly turn it on is still genuinely startling…"

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

- Scenes cut from Get Back that featured in Let It Be include the opening footage of roadie Mal Evans setting the stage at Twickenham and Ringo later falling off his drum stool at Apple.
- The three-handed boogie-woogie tune Paul and Ringo are seen playing on the grand piano at Twickenham has an actual title: I Bought A Piano The Other Day (credited to Lennon/McCartney/Starkey).
- McCartney's final rooftop words in the film – "Thanks, Mo!" – are directed at Maureen Starkey, who is more extensively shown in Get Back grooving away to the band.

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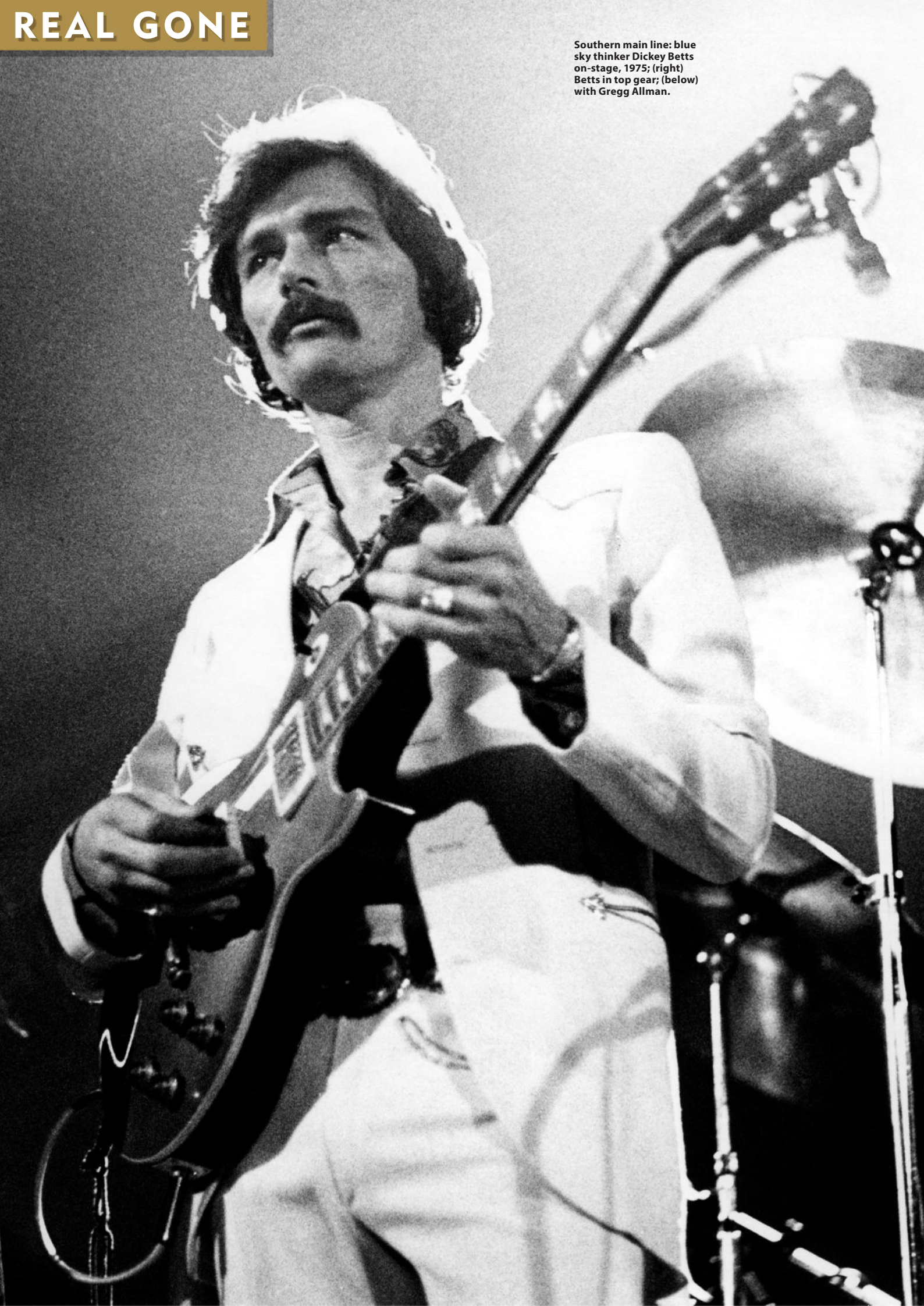
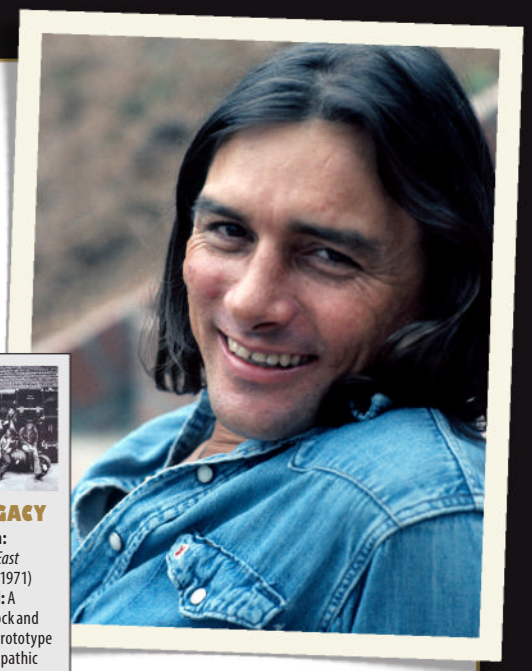


Southern main line: blue sky thinker Dickey Betts on-stage, 1975; (right) Betts in top gear; (below) with Gregg Allman.

Ramblin' Man

The Allman Brothers Band's guitar great **Dickey Betts** left us on April 18.



DICKEY BETTS' fine songwriting and trailblazing twin-lead guitar work with Duane Allman secured his prime berth in the Southern rock firmament, but he made his mark elsewhere, too. Bob Dylan exhorted us to listen to Betts' music in 2020's Murder Most Foul, and in Britain even car enthusiasts with little affinity with down-home '70s rusticity would recognise Jessica, the Betts-penned composition BBC TV show Top Gear adopted as its long-standing theme-tune. A buoyant instrumental Betts hatched on The Allman Brothers Band's communal farm in Juliette, Georgia in 1972, Jessica was named for his then infant daughter, but had infinite reach. In 2006, The Wall Street Journal called it "a true national heirloom."

When Billy Crudup played Russell Hammond of fictional band Stillwater in Cameron Crowe's film Almost Famous, moreover, it was Dickey Betts that Crowe had in mind as Crudup's model. The writer/director cited Betts' air of "possible danger and playful recklessness behind his eyes", and acknowledged that "Crudup's look, and much more, is a tribute to Dickey."

Fiction aside, The Allman Brothers Band created the mythos of Southern rock rebellion and tragedy through living it. With his horseshoe moustache and Stetson, later a necklace of alligator teeth, the hotel-trashing, cop-punching Betts was at the epicentre of it all. Like his bandmates, he had a magic mushroom tattooed on his leg as a symbol of their decadent brotherhood.

Betts was, however, never given to cliché when playing. Dreams, from The Allman Brothers Band's self-titled 1969 debut was a swinging waltz blues in 12/8 time, with Duane and Dickey pushing forward as if on some existential quest. Elsewhere, Betts' exquisite instrumental In Memory Of Elizabeth Reed, from 1970's *Idlewild South*, was his tribute to Miles Davis, its modal, sax-like solos reflecting the breadth and depth of Betts' inter-genre understanding.

He was born in West Palm Beach, Florida on December 12, 1943. His father Harold was a carpenter who played fiddle; his mother Sarah wrote poetry and played the cornet in a Salvation Army band. Betts grew up immersed in bluegrass, country and Western Swing music, played ukulele from the age of five, and quickly graduated to banjo, mandolin and guitar.

He and future Allman Brothers bassist Berry Oakley were in Cream-obsessed band Second Coming when Duane Allman – fresh from his session stint on Wilson Pickett's February '69 cover of The Beatles' Hey Jude – slowly drew them into a six-piece band he had originally conceived of as a trio comprising himself, Oakley and Muscle Shoals session drummer Jai Johanny 'Jaimoe' Johanson.

"Nobody really planned it – it came together like a Polaroid picture developing," Betts told Jim Dorman in 2003 of the inaugural Allman Brothers Band squad that added himself, Duane's all-important younger brother Gregg on vocals and organ, and second drummer Butch Trucks. "We all knew we were onto something special, though."

From the outset they were progressive; different from the later minority of more reactionary redneck acts who eulogised them yet missed the point. Not far behind Sly & The Family Stone with their interracial line-up – Ocean Springs, Mississippi-born Jaimoe was black and had played with Otis Redding – The Allman Brothers Band tapped jazz and soul as well as blues and country, and 500 gigs in their first two years of existence honed the extraordinary lead-guitar interplay between Allman and Betts.

> **"We all knew we were on to something special."**
> **DICKEY BETTS**

On monumental 1971 live release *At Fillmore East* (a record deemed so culturally and artistically significant that it was selected for preservation in Washington DC's Library Of Congress in 2004) they duelled on landmark, much-extended versions of In Memory Of Elizabeth Reed and Whipping Post, sometimes joining forces on inspired, twin-lead harmonies which pre-dated those of Thin Lizzy by a good five years.

THE LEGACY

The Album: *At Fillmore East* (Capricorn, 1971)
The Sound: A Southern rock and jam-band prototype of near-telepathic majesty, Duane Allman and Dickey Betts demonstrating why Duane considered The Brothers' shows a religious experience. Eclectic, soulful and hugely influential, *AFE* is oft-cited as one of the greatest live albums ever. The Black Crowes and many others took note.

Then, on October 29, 1971, Duane Allman died swerving to avoid a truck while riding his Harley Davidson. Betts became de facto band leader, steering 1972's mellower, sometimes mournful *Eat A Peach* to completion, and writing Les Brers In A Minor for Duane, after whom he would name his only son. The LP also featured Betts' Blue Sky, a fine country song of gratitude named for his Native American then wife.

1973's *Brothers And Sisters* continued The Allman Brothers' ascendency, largely thanks to their Betts-penned biggest hit, Ramblin' Man. Part-inspired by the Hank Williams song of the same name, it was one of the last ABB songs to feature Berry Oakley, who was killed in a motorcycle crash on November 11, 1972, just blocks from where Duane was killed.

Intra-band feuds, debilitating drug habits and knotty court cases would also take their toll, but Betts continued to play with The Allman Brothers Band until they split in 1976. He was part of re-formation stints between 1978 and 1982, then 1989 and 2000, but was sacked that year by his bandmates. They cited bossiness, drinking issues and unpredictability; Betts blamed "a whole clandestine business thing".

His sizeable solo output included Bougainvillea, a 1977 co-write with actor Don Johnson, and spanned 1974's *Highway Call* to 2021's *Official Bootleg Vol. 1*. Mindful, perhaps of Butch Trucks' tragic suicide in January 2017, Betts healed his rift with Gregg Allman before Allman died that May, but a stroke in 2018 slowed Betts down, and he died of cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease at his home in Osprey, Florida on April 18, aged 80. He's survived by his fifth wife, Donna, and children Kimberly, Christy, Jessica and Duane.

"I've had a great life and I don't have any complaints," he'd told Rolling Stone some years earlier, while a statement posted on The Allman Brothers Band official website after Betts died imagined him touring "in that old Winnebago in the sky." "Play on Brother Dickey," it concluded, "you will be forever remembered and deeply missed."

James McNair

Getty (3)

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John Sinclair

Detroit counterculture icon

BORN 1941

FEARLESSLY ADVOCATING "total assault on the culture, including rock'n'roll, dope and fucking in the streets," firebrand Detroit poet John Sinclair mentor-managed the MC5 through its jams-kicking peak, suffering relentless drug busts and jail before John Lennon's high-profile rallying secured his release.

Born on October 2, 1941, in Flint, Michigan, Sinclair's activist spirit was ignited at university by liberated jazz messengers such as Coltrane. Graduating in 1964 he wrote for Downbeat, co-founded the Detroit Artists Workshop, promoted events and edited pro-marijuana underground newspapers. Routinely subjected to police aggression, Sinclair had served six months for possession when he met local guitar band the Motor City Five in 1966, overseeing their transformation into the insurrectionary MC5 with gonzo hyperbole.

After starting the anti-racist White Panther party and ensuring MC5 performed at Chicago's 1968 Democratic National Convention before rioting ensued, Sinclair oversaw their *Kick Out The Jams* album campaign that got them booted off Elektra. After an undercover sting operation saw him sentenced to 10 years for two joints in 1969, Lennon was galvanised to compose John Sinclair ("Was he jailed for what he done/Or representin' everyone?"), performed with Yoko Ono and Stevie Wonder at a December 1971 arena rally. Sinclair was released two days later.

Sinclair spent the next six decades writing, performing, broadcasting and releasing his jazz poetry. Other releases included 2010's Green Party election single Lock And Key and 2017's solo LP *Beatnik Youth* with producer Youth, who called him, "A pioneer who changed the world."

"I've never stopped," Sinclair told this writer. "People knew about me because of the MC5 and John Lennon but everything I've done since then is totally underground. I just continue to be productive. My motto is always, 'They can't stop me!'"

First to light up when Michigan legalised cannabis in 2019, he succumbed to heart failure at a Detroit hospital on April 2.

Kris Needs

Gerry Conway

Folk-rock drummer supreme

BORN 1947

"WHAT A lad, and what ingenuity and style," wrote Yusuf/Cat Stevens as he responded to the news that jazz-savvy folk rock drummer Gerry Conway had died at the age of 76. Born in Norfolk, Conway worked in the post room at EMI and backed Alexis Korner before finding his niche during spells with Eclection and then Sandy Denny's Fotheringay. His many sessions included appearances on Al Stewart's *Zero She Flies*, Steeleye Span's *Hark! The Village Wait* and the bulk of Cat Stevens' 1970s output. A sometime member of Pentangle (and partner of singer Jacqui McShee), Conway played with Jethro Tull in the 1980s, then joined Fairport Convention in 1998, retiring in 2022 when (unbeknownst to bandmates) he was struggling with motor neurone disease. Fairport guitarist Simon Nicol called Conway "wonderfully patient and wise… and blessed with his own inner calm and solidity," and added: "I'm going to miss him more than I can say."

Jim Wirth

Larry Page

Kinks/Troggs '60s pop player

BORN CIRCA 1938

AT HIS mid-'60s peak, Larry Page went from co-managing The Kinks to producing and managing The Troggs, and founding his own Page One label. With those bands, he respectively broke You Really Got Me, paving the way for heavy metal, and Wild Thing, Britain's answer to US garage-punk. Page began by packing discs at EMI's factory in Hayes. Switching to singing, he dyed his hair blue and was dubbed 'The Teenage Rage'; the publicity didn't guarantee success. Moving into management, Page mentored the young Steve Marriott, who later said, "You don't meet many as straight as him in this business." Nevertheless, the Daimler-driving Michael Caine lookalike soon found himself in litigation with The Kinks and The Troggs. It's a measure of their respect that both acts would later re-employ the energetic Page, who also produced Chelsea FC's anthem Blue Is The Colour.

Mark Paytress

Keith LeBlanc

Sugarhill/Tackhead beatmaster

BORN 1954

RAISED IN Bristol, Connecticut, in 1979 LeBlanc was an aspiring NY drummer when he was tipped off about a vacancy in the Sugar Hill label's house band. Already incumbent were guitarist Skip McDonald and bassist Doug Wimbish, and over the next four years this trio played on pioneering electro and rap tracks including Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five's The Message. In '83, LeBlanc himself experimented with samplers and drum machines to create No Sell Out, featuring speeches by Malcolm X. Around that release, he was introduced to On-U Sound's Adrian Sherwood, who poached the trio to work for him in London, that hard-hitting political style carrying forward into LeBlanc's nominally solo *Major Malfunction* (1986), and a succession of speaker-blasters including Fats Comet, Tackhead and Mark Stewart's Maffia. Following '90s sessions for Nine Inch Nails and Tina Turner, LeBlanc disappeared off the radar, but reunited with Tackhead for On-U's 40th anniversary show at London's Forum in April 2022.

Andrew Perry

"LeBlanc worked on speaker-blasters by Fats Comet, Tackhead and the Maffia."

John Sinclair: "a pioneer who changed the world."

Leni Sinclair/Getty, Brian Rasic/Getty, ANL/Shutterstock, Kishi Yamamoto

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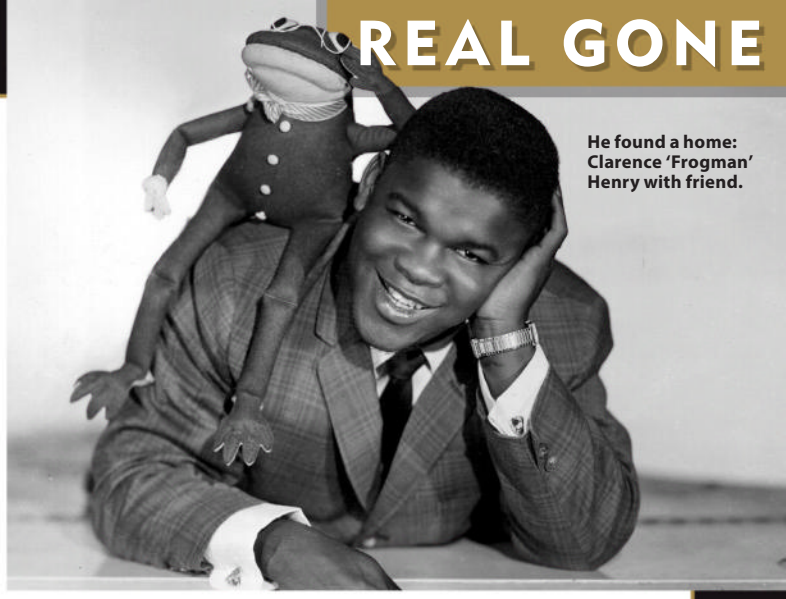


He found a home: Clarence 'Frogman' Henry with friend.

Clarence 'Frogman' Henry

Big Easy prince

BORN 1937

SOME OF the greatest pop springs from a concatenation of happy accidents. Despite just scraping the Billboard Top 30, 1956's Ain't Got No Home gave Clarence Henry his nickname, career and regular royalties, the movies Diner, Forrest Gump and Casino using it to evoke lost innocence. Originally improvised at dawn by the 18-year-old New Orleans R&B singer-pianist to encourage club patrons to go home, its hook were verses sung successively in the tenor, falsetto and croak of a 'lonely boy', 'girl' and 'frog'. Though the genial maestro had only two more hits, 1961's (I Don't Know Why) But I Do, written by Bobby Charles, and You Always Hurt The One You Love, club crowds loved him: The Beatles, who he opened for in 1964, were also early, eminent fans. He had been booked to play at this month's New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

Mat Snow

Mike Pinder

Moodies mellotron master

BORN 1941

FEW HIGH '60s sounds come with as much numinous frisson as the mellotron. Mike Pinder had been familiar with the tape-keyboard since working as quality controller at Birmingham manufacturers Streetly Electronics in 1963, later reflecting, "I passed no 'tron before its time." As well as introducing John Lennon to it, from 1967 he played it with symphonic panache with The Moody Blues, the group he'd co-founded in 1964. After soulful UK Number 1 Go Now in 1965, a stylistic/line-up re-think led to success in the UK and US with a series of acid-flambé'd concept albums and hit singles including 1967's immortal Nights In White Satin. Pinder, who played multiple instruments, sang and narrated, and wrote and arranged for the group, departed after 1978's *Octave*, and later worked for the Atari corporation in Malibu. He also released several solo LPs.

Ian Harrison

Chris Cross

Ultravox bassist

BORN 1952

BORN Christopher Thomas Allen in Tottenham, London, Chris Cross co-founded glamsters Tiger Lily with John Foxx in 1973. That band would evolve into Ultravox!, an important influence on post-punk, art rock and electronic music with their strong trio of '77-78 studio LPs. Art school-trained, Cross played bass, provided a studied charm, and was equally fond of Desmond Dekker and Neu!. The arrival of frontman Midge Ure in 1979 brought the band commercial success, though Cross admitted he quite liked Joe Dolce's novelty hit Shaddup You Face, which kept Ultravox's Vienna off UK Number 1 in 1981. After performing at Live Aid in 1985, the group faded out in the late '80s, and Cross trained as a Neo-Reichian psychotherapist. He rejoined Ultravox in 2009 for live dates and 2012's LP *Brilliant*. Ure hailed him as "the glue that held the band together."

David Buckley

THEY ALSO SERVED

MONTANA ROCK'N'ROLLER **CHAN ROMERO** (below, b.1941) found success with his 1959 song The Hippy Hippy Shake. It was later a UK/US hit for **The Swinging Blue Jeans** in 1964, and was covered by **The Beatles**. Romero was later the first Latino singer inducted into the Rockabilly Hall Of Fame.

NEW YORK ARTIST **MARIAN ZAZEELA** (b.1940) was renowned for her collaborations with her partner **La Monte Young**. The pair's most celebrated work, 1974's *Dream House*, combined Young's drones with Zazeela's magenta light projections. Zazeela provided graphics and visual material for all Young's concerts and performed as a vocalist and tambura player in his ensembles.

KEYBOARDIST AND PRODUCER **BERNIE CLARKE** (b.unknown) worked with Alvin Lee's **Ten Years Later**, **Bram Tchaikovsky** and **Manfred Mann's Earth Band** in the '70s. He later joined **Aztec Camera**: he co-produced and played on 1983's classic debut *High Land, Hard Rain* and its singles. He also worked with **Poison Girls**, **The Go-Betweens** and **Edwyn Collins**.

SAXOPHONIST, PRODUCER, MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST **CASEY BENJAMIN** (b.1978) was a member of the **Robert Glasper Experiment**, appearing on 2012's Grammy-winning *Black Radio*. Raised in Queens, Benjamin also played with **Arto Lindsay**, **YolanDa Brown** and **Solange**, formed funk outfit Heavy, and was an associate producer of Q-Tip's forthcoming Broadway musical based on the life of Muhammad Ali.

TORNADOS bassist **BRIAN GREGG** (b.1939) played with **Terry Dene**, **Georgie Fame**'s **Blue Flames** and Larry Parnes stable band **The Beat Boys** before joining **Johnny Kidd & The Pirates** in December 1959. Gregg duly played on 1960 Brit-rock classic Shakin' All Over. In 1963 he briefly replaced Heinz in **The Tornados**, and later played in Pirates reunions.

BRITISH RAP PIONEER **MC DUKE** (b.1966) became a leading UK rap voice on 1989's *Organised Rhyme* LP – with its memorable 'English gentleman' cover concept – and minor hit I'm Riffin' (English Rasta). The East Ender also recorded for Shut Up And Dance, released jungle techno tracks and was sampled on The Prodigy's Everybody In The Place.

GUITARIST **GRAEME NAYSMITH** (below, b.c.1967) played with Leeds shoegaze-affiliates **Pale Saints** from 1987 to 1996. Signed to 4AD, 1990's debut *The Comforts Of Madness* peaked at Number 40; they split after '94's *Slow Buildings* (Select magazine dubbed Naysmith "an apprentice stadium swashbuckler"). He later played with **Lorimer**, **The Program** and **The X-Ray Eyes**.

SINGER **ARTHUR 'POOCH' TAVARES** (b.1942) sang lead with **Tavares**, the family R&B quintet from New Bedford, MA. The second eldest brother, Pooch's seductive baritone was heard on 1976's signature hit Heaven Must Be Missing An Angel, and the **Bee Gees**' More Than A Woman from the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack, which won them a Grammy.

BASSIST **STEVE KILLE** (b.unknown) played with Washington DC's post-hardcore psych-rockers **Dead Meadow** from 1998. A visual artist, recording engineer and label boss, Kille's hypnotic bass and sitar were central to Dead Meadow's acid jams. Confirming their cult status, Dead Meadow's 2012 Peel Session was the first to be recorded outside of the UK.

DJ and producer **PAUL NICE** (below, b.1956) worked the **Beastie Boys**, **Biz Markie**, **Ol'Dirty Bastard** and others. Starting out in Poughkeepsie, NY in the early '80s, he also compiled DJ breaks series *5 Fingers Of Death* and *Drum Library*: his Fists Of The White Lotus instrumental was used by rappers including **Biggie Smalls** and **Jay-Z**.

GUITARIST/BASSIST **JACK GREEN** (b.1951) played with **T. Rex** on 1974's *Zinc Alloy...* album. He later worked with **The Pretty Things**, **Metropolis** and **Rainbow**, recorded 1980's solo debut *Humanesque*, joined Mickey Finn's T. Rex and released his farewell, *The Party At The End Of The World*, in 2020.

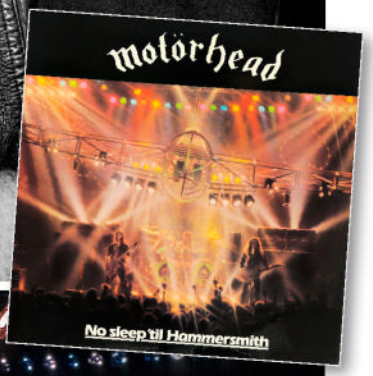
PRODUCER/HISTORIAN **MICHAEL CUSCUNA** (b.1948) was a DJ and journalist before turning to production with artists including **Bonnie Raitt**, **Garland Jeffreys** and **Chris Smither**. From 1975 he curated the unreleased catalogue of Blue Note – 2005's **Thelonious Monk Quartet With John Coltrane** *At Carnegie Hall* was one archival triumph – and co-founded Grammy-winning specialist label Mosaic in 1982 to carry on his work in jazz.

KEYBOARDIST **BILL BRIGGS** (b.1945) was a founding member of Boston garage rockers **The Remains**. A popular live act in New England, they performed on The Ed Sullivan Show and opened for The Beatles on their final US tour in 1966. They split the same year, but re-formed in 1998 and released *Movin' On* in 2002.

Jenny Bulley, Chris Catchpole and Ian Harrison

Bleddyn Butcher, Getty (3)

The need for speed: Motörhead wide awake at the Aragon Ballroom, Chicago, summer 1981 (from left) 'Philthy Animal' Taylor, Lemmy, 'Fast' Eddie Clarke; (below, from left) Ozzy Osbourne and Lemmy clean up their act; Ozzy brings the Blizzard; Motörhead crank it up on-stage.



JUNE 1981
...Motörhead reach their peak

JUNE 2 Having been fired from Black Sabbath in 1979, Ozzy Osbourne had his solo debut *Blizzard Of Ozz* to promote. And to add to the heavy metal havoc of the US leg of his Blizzard Of Ozz tour, British rockers Budgie, Def Leppard and Saxon were booked as support. Another UK group – the loudest and grimiest of them all – were also engaged.

After years slogging around the motorways of Britain and Europe, Motörhead were touring America for the first time. This June 2, they were putting the headbangers at the Kansas City Memorial Hall through their paces. "We don't like to be called heavy metal music," drummer 'Philthy Animal' Taylor had told Trouser Press in May. "It's more like hard, fast, nasty, disgusting rock."

Now settled on their classic line-up – bassist and singer Lemmy, guitarist 'Fast' Eddie Clarke and drummer Philthy – it was a time of triumph for the group. Over the last year they'd enjoyed Top 10 UK chart success with the Golden Years Live EP and the St Valentine's Day Massacre EP team-up with Girlschool; in November 1980 their rabid calling card Ace Of Spades reached Number 13 in the singles chart, while its similarly titled parent album reached Number 4.

Now Ozzy had invited them on a huge US tour, which he announced at a CBS sales convention in Los Angeles in March when he bit the heads off two white doves (he'd been drinking brandy, he later explained). The British press was keen to see what was going down. In June 6's NME, Mick Farren met old pal Lemmy for a gig in New Jersey, and observed how Motörhead had to leave their Bomber stage set and effects at home to make room for Ozzy's gothic castle.

Also published on June 6, Sounds' Garry Bushell reported from a gig at the Hudson Civic Hall in Poughkeepsie. Noting that the group came on-stage to Ennio Morricone's dramatic movie theme to The Good, The Bad And The Ugly, Bushell described getting two black eyes in the pogo'ing scrum during Ace Of Spades. Later, drummer Philthy reflected on a drug charge he was facing back home, saying it was the nearest the law would ever get to Lemmy. 'Fast' Eddie declared, "We'll never lose our energy… you'll never see 'Fast' Eddie with an acoustic guitar. Motörhead will keep on as they are 'til one of us drops dead."

> **"We don't like to be called heavy metal… it's more like hard, fast, nasty, disgusting rock."**
> **'PHILTHY ANIMAL' TAYLOR**

And so, with 10 days off after a June 7 show in Houston, the dates rolled on across America's halls until July 18. Performances were always full-throttle, all guns blazing affairs, fuelled by Special Brew, spirits and speed, and what Motör-friend Kris Needs called in 2021, "an inter-band powder keg dynamic that could see a massed brawl erupt if someone farted in the dressing room."

At this moment of US exposure, something massive and pungent was also brewing at home. Producer Vic Maile had recorded a March 30 Newcastle City Hall show on the Short Sharp Pain In The Neck UK tour,

Getty Images (7), Alamy

named in tribute to vertebrae damage Philthy suffered after he drunkenly fell down a flight of stairs in Belfast in December 1980. Comprised of songs from the albums *Motörhead*, *Overkill*, *Bomber* and *Ace Of Spades* – and adding extra recordings from a Leeds date – furious live LP *No Sleep 'Til Hammersmith* thundered straight into the UK album charts at Number 1 on June 21. Two weeks later, a live version of Motörhead, a song Lemmy first recorded with his old band Hawkwind in 1975, was released. By mid-July it was at Number 6.

Little did they suspect, but Motörhead had peaked, having scored their last Top 10 single and only Number 1 LP. "*No Sleep 'Til Hammersmith* was our claim to fame," Lemmy told MOJO in 2006. "And then that moment has to define you, see. That's the trouble."

Yet true to the blunt Staffordshire grit and backbone that had sustained him since the days of roadying for Hendrix, gigging with The Rockin' Vickers and speeding for England with Hawkwind, Lemmy simply got on with it. Line-ups shifted, but he and Motörhead remained remarkably unchanged and immune to changing styles until he checked out 18 albums and innumerable gigs later, on December 18, 2015. Philthy predeceased him by a month: 'Fast' Eddie followed both in January 2018.

Lemmy had unequivocally stated the Motörhead case to Sounds back in summer '81 in America. "People only change 'cos they think they should," he said. "Chuck Berry never changed. Little Richard never changed. I'd rather be like that."

Ian Harrison

Fun boy one: Terry Hall at the final Specials gig.

The Specials eye the end...

JUNE 20 **The Specials' final single Ghost Town, a haunting denunciation of Thatcherite economics, enters the UK charts at Number 14. This month the band play gigs in Coventry (June 20) and Rotherham (June 27). Their last show follows at the Northern Carnival Against Racism at Leeds Potternewton Park on July 4. On July 7, the group play Ghost Town on Top Of The Pops. The same day, band members Terry Hall, Lynval Golding and Neville Staples announce they're leaving (they'll have their first hit as the Fun Boy Three in November). On July 10, a wave of riots erupts across Britain: on July 11, Ghost Town reaches Number 1, where it will stay for three weeks.**

Scum of the streets: The Clash smarten up for their New York residency.

THE CLASH ROCK BOND'S CASINO

JUNE 13 Promoting 1980's triple-LP *Sandinista!*, The Clash finish a sold-out 17-show residency at Bond's International Casino on Times Square in New York. After the opening May 28 date, the club's 4,000-capacity is reduced to 1,750 after a hazard inspection by fire inspectors: The Clash add extra shows so all ticketholders can see them. With support acts including Grandmaster Flash And The Furious Five, Lee 'Scratch' Perry, Dead Kennedys and The Fall, attendees include actor Robert De Niro, the young Beastie Boys and director Martin Scorsese, who duly films the band in cameo roles as 'Street Scum' for his 1983 movie The King Of Comedy. Don Letts is also on hand, shooting footage for his lost documentary Clash On Broadway.

ALSO ON!

PRINCE ROCKS LONDON

2 Prince (above) plays his first British show, at the London Lyceum: reviewers note his long mac, jockstrap and stockings, and Record Mirror uses the descriptor "punk rock Teddy Pendergrass." He does not return for five years.

ALL THE SPLITS

5 It's reported that Howard Devoto has left Magazine, just weeks before the release of band swansong *Magic, Murder And The Weather*. This month also sees Stuart Adamson depart the Skids, Pauline Black quit The Selecter and Yes split, with Chris Squire and Alan White planning a new band with Jimmy Page.

FLOYD HIT THE WALL

17 Pink Floyd play the last date of the two-year The Wall Live Tour at London's Earl's Court. It will be the band's last performance with Roger Waters until Live 8 in 2005.

MEGAMIX UP

20 Starsound's Beatles-and-more hits medley Stars On 45 is US Number 1. It's also Top 10 in the UK and across Europe: it's the creation of ex-Golden Earring drummer Jaap Eggermont, inspired by a Canadian disco bootleg called Bits And Pieces.

MILES STYLES

26 Miles Davis plays his first live shows in five years at the Kix disco in Boston. In July he releases *The Man With The Horn*, his first new music since 1972.

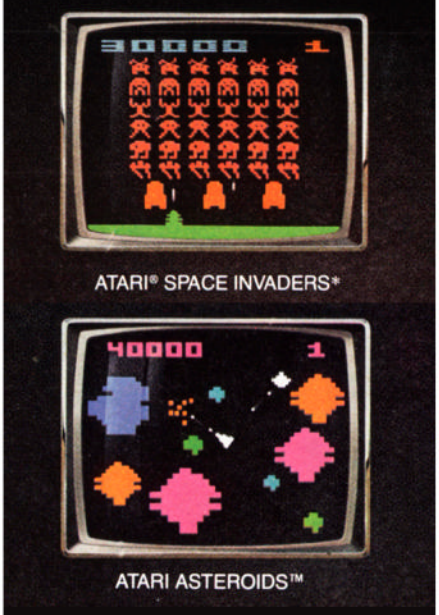
TOP TEN

ITALY SINGLES **JUNE 16**

1 **SARÀ PERCHÉ TI AMO** RICCHI & POVERI BABY
2 **AMOUREUX SOLITAIRES** LIO ARIOLA
3 **SEMPLICE** GIANNI TOGNI PARADISO
4 **GIOCA-JOUER** CLAUDIO CECCHETT HIT MANIA
5 **JOHNNY AND MARY** ROBERT PALMER ISLAND
6 **ENOLA GAY** OMD DINDISC
7 **WOMAN** JOHN LENNON GEFFEN
8 **TUNNEL OF LOVE** DIRE STRAITS VERTIGO
9 **WOMAN IN LOVE** BARBRA STREISAND CBS
10 **E INVECE NO** EDOARDO BENNATO RICORDI

Playing solitaire: Lio on her own at Number 2.

AD ARCHIVE 1981



This month you could get space shooter Asteroids for your Atari TV games console, to go with Space Invaders. Truly the future was calling!

Who based songs on a film?

Let us answer your nagging rock questions and resolve your musical doubts.

Debaser by the Pixies relates to the 1929 Luis Buñuel/Salvador Dalí short film Un Chien Andalou, while the group's song Gigantic was, said Kim Deal, based on the 1986 movie Crimes Of The Heart. Who else has written songs after watching a film? It must make things easier…

Paul Scott, via e-mail

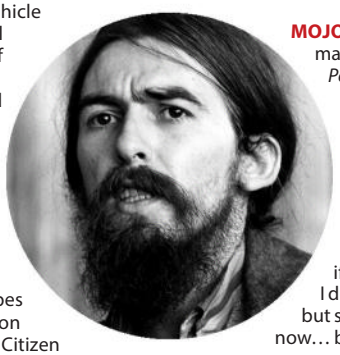
MOJO says: Watching a movie and then penning a song inspired by it is a long-established practice. Scott Walker reframed Bergman's 1957 death-fantasia The Seventh Seal as a western on *Scott 4* in 1969, while Roxy Music's 1972 track 2HB was based on the 1942 Humphrey Bogart vehicle Casablanca. The Clash were serial offenders, with Charlie Don't Surf quoting Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now in 1980 and Red Angel Dragnet lifting lines from Scorsese's film Taxi Driver in 1982; three years later, Mick Jones's Big Audio Dynamite repurposed Nic Roeg features including Performance, The Man Who Fell To Earth and more for E=MC^2. Other notable examples include The White Stripes basing The Union Forever on Orson Welles's 1941 debut/masterwork Citizen Kane, Merle Haggard, Georgie Fame, Brigitte Bardot and Serge Gainsbourg all singing songs based on 1967 armed robbery romance Bonnie And Clyde, and the multiple pictures Iron Maiden have based songs on (try Where Eagles Dare and Run Silent Run Deep for starters). And how about Ultravox! (Hiroshima Mon Amour), R.E.M. (Imitation Of Life) or Dave Edmunds (The Creature From The Black Lagoon)? The opposite phenomenon of movies lifting song titles is another ripe debate, as 1995 Andy García vehicle Things To Do In Denver When You're Dead did with Warren Zevon, John Hughes' Pretty In Pink did with The Psychedelic Furs, and 2006 rom com You, Me And Dupree did when it borrowed egregiously from Steely Dan's Cousin Dupree. The latter situation prompted the Dan to pen an open letter to featured actor Owen Wilson's brother Luke observing, "they didn't even bother to think of a new fucking name for the guy." Got any good suggestions?

Screen-age kicks: (clockwise from top left) The White Stripes channelled Orson Welles's Citizen Kane; fade away: Blondie's *Parallel Lines* title track disappeared; John Cooper Clarke's "genius" *Disguise In Love* LP; George Harrison: one Thingy… led to another?

WILL JCC SING AGAIN?

It's good to see Dr John Cooper Clarke's been out on the road. But will he ever record his poetry to music again? I still think *Disguise In Love* and *Snap, Crackle & Bop* are works of genius.

Gerry Clarke, via e-mail



MOJO says: John said he enjoyed making his 2016 album *This Time It's Personal* with Hugh Cornwell but says: "I haven't got any plans to do that. Putting music with [poetry] was never my idea in the first place, but I don't regret it. In fact, some of the poems, I wrote them because there were some spare tracks, so they wouldn't have been there at all if it hadn't been for the music. I don't think it's always successful, but sometimes it is. So not right now… but never say never."

BLONDIE BRAINSQUEEZE

My vinyl copy of Blondie's *Parallel Lines* contains lyrics to a title song, between Fade Away And Radiate and Pretty Baby. The track does not appear on the LP and to my knowledge has never been released. Why?

Ray Foster, via e-mail

MOJO says: As far as we know, this mysterious song (the lyrics include the lines, "Ships that pass in the night… Evangeline's dream") was not only not recorded, it was never played live and no one has ever attempted an imaginative cover version (though Todd Rundgren and Subway Sect both had songs of that title). Which makes it rather legendary. Can anyone out there shed any light?

FRED SOULS?

I've heard the Fairbrass brothers of Right Said Fred claim in interviews that they once supported Joy Division. It seems implausible that the 'I'm Too Sexy' duo shared a stage with Ian Curtis. Is there any truth to their story?

John Deol, via e-mail

MOJO says: Back when the Fairbrass brothers were in The Actors they did indeed support Joy Division and Suicide at a gig at the Factory Club in Manchester on July 28, 1978 (it was £1 to get in). An NME review by Paul Morley thought to be of the night only mentions Joy Division ("they have learnt to sculpt, not merely to emit") but mentions of The Actors there are none.

HELP MOJO

In MOJO 361 the Bob Dylan article mentioned a letter from George Harrison to Dylan in which he shared the chords to the song Thingymubob (later to emerge as I'd Have You Anytime). What intrigues me is that same year Paul McCartney wrote a tune for the Black Dyke Mills Band also called Thingymubob. So, did Paul steal the title from George or was it, as I am thinking, just a commonplace saying?

Colin Morris, Wellington, New Zealand

CONTACT MOJO

Have you got a challenging musical question for the MOJO Brains Trust? E-mail **askmojo@bauermedia.co.uk** and we'll help untangle your trickiest puzzles.

Getty (3), Alamy

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Worth £399, we have one in Coffee Black to give away as this month's crossword prize. How to enter: take the letters from each coloured square on the grid below and rearrange them to form the name of a musician. Visit www.mojo4music.com/crossword and fill out the form, along with your answer, in the provided field. Entry is free and closes at midnight on **July 2, 2024**. Winners are selected at random. For the rules of the quiz, see www.mojo4music.com.

For more info, go to: www.pure-audio.com

ANSWERS

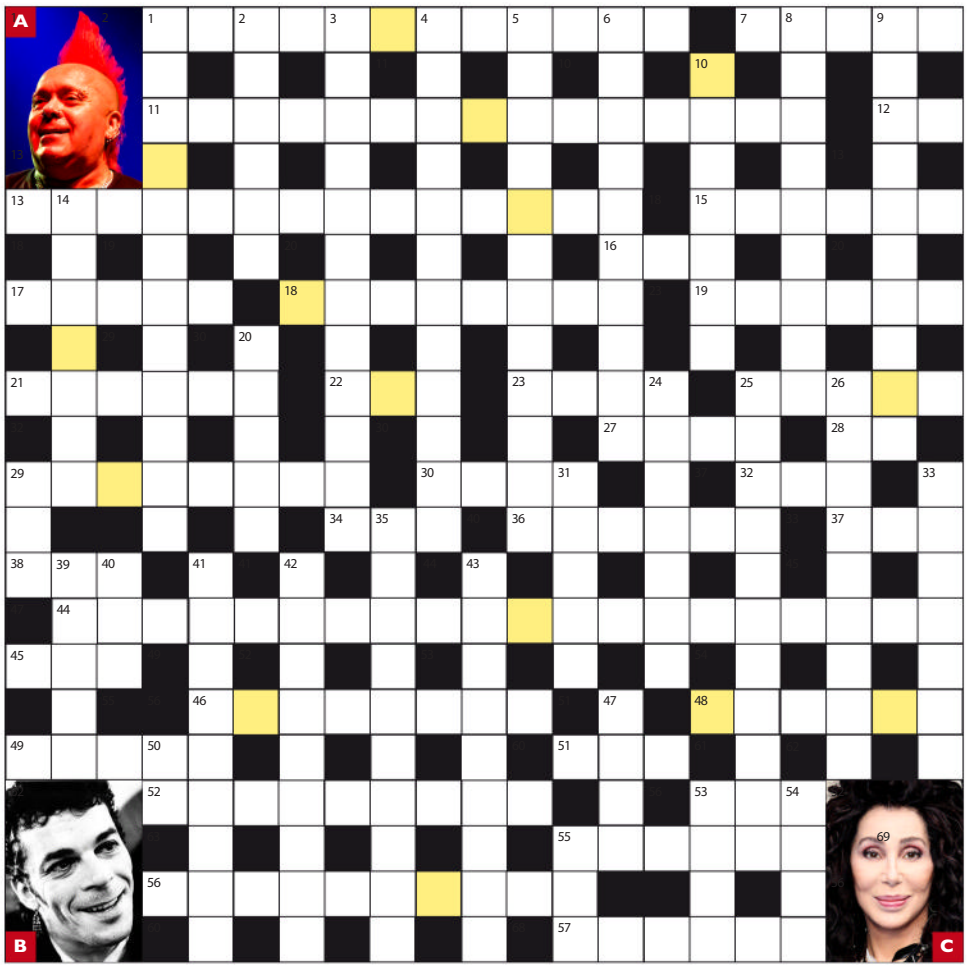
MOJO 366

Across: 1 Badfinger, 7 New Motor, 12 Lion, 14 Thrills, 18 The Chronic, 19 Ha, 20 EPs, 21 Nina, 22 Yawn, 24 Vet, 26 Glee, 28 Yoyo, 29 Uptown, 30 Not War, 31 Eric Clapton, 33 Ah, 36 Utopia, 37 LA, 38 Eunuch,40 Sam Yaffa, 42 PRT, 43 Gyrate, 44 Emo, 47 Vanguard, 49 Irma, 50 Superman, 52 Amok, 53 Judgment, 55 El, 57 Departed, 61 Lu, 62 Olive, 63 Roebuck Staples, 65 Sophie, 66 Sleater, 70 Raoul & The Ruined, 71 Atom Heart Mother.

Down: 1 Bath, 2 DHR, 3 Ill, 4 Nile, 5 Gospel, 6 En, 8 Encino, 9 Mars Volta, 10 Tina Turner, 11 Rocket Man, 13 Shea, 15 Hang On To Your Ego, 16 I Know A Place, 22 Ye, 23 Wyclef, 25 KWS, 26 Grease, 27 Enigma, 32 Plague Mass, 34 Humor, 35 Thomas Leer, 39 Ute, 41 Amazulu, 42 Piranhas, 45 Mike Leander, 46 Cameo, 48 DMT, 51 RAR, 54 Duck, 56 List, 58 Agharta, 59 Tremolo, 60 Delilah, 62 Ole, 64 Plinth, 67 Etta, 68 Zeit, 69 Hugo.

Anagram: Sterling Morrison.

Winner: David Ryder of **Bury St Edmunds** wins a Phazer MK II effects pedal from Hylight Electronics.



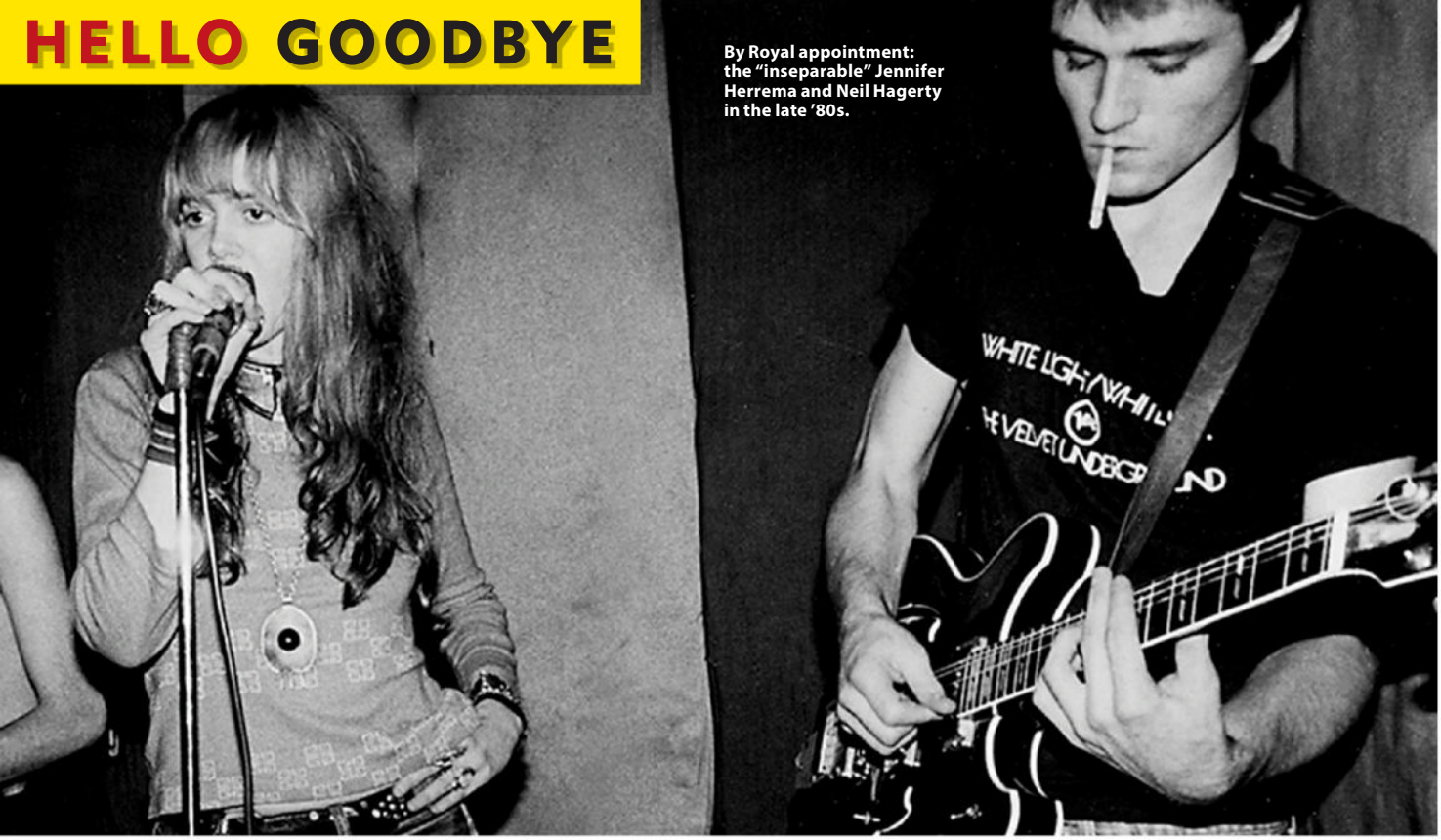
Getty (3); Alex Gretter

ACROSS

1 see photoclue A (6,6)
7 Pet Shop Boys' 1986 remix collection (5)
11 Elvis, Dylan and Paul Weller all sang this Gordon Lightfoot song (5,6,4)
12 Alexis Korner gets personal in '79 (2)
13 Sam Cooke's 1960 classic, co-written with Lou Adler and Herb Alpert (9,5)
15 Fat White Family and Warmduscher's rude house project (6)
16 Cleveland punk oddities Pere --- (3)
17 AKA Toni Halliday and Dean Garcia (5)
18 Lennon had one In The Works (8)
19 What Sparks renamed their Roland keyboard (6)
21 Bee Gees' 1969 LP which preceded Robin temporarily leaving (6)
22 Get 'em in for the sole LP from Bournemouth power-poppers Denzil (3)
23 Hi---- Sneakers (Tommy Tucker) (4)
25 Chapel Hill indie label, home to Neutral Milk Hotel, Arcade Fire and more (5)
27 Lou Reed's week beats your ---- (4)
28 Lennie De Ice and pals were who, in '92? (1,1)
29 Twenty One Pilots' headache (8)
30 Willie Colón and Rubén Blades had theirs on you in '78 (4)
32 The very first non-state owned label in the USSR (3)
34 Library don Alan, who wrote for The Two Ronnies, among others (3)
36 Stiff Little Fingers' Alternative locale (6)
37 Danish trombone ace Mr Winding (3)
38 Macca's Paul Epworth-assisted LP of 2013 (3)
44 Ozzy, Tony, Geezer and Bill's fifth (7,6,7)
45 David Crosby project with his son James Raymond (3)
46 Roy Ayers, everywhere? (8)
48 Pointer Sisters' LP which covered Springsteen, Sly Stone and more (6)
49 Reducer, Youth or Temple (5)
51 The Monkees, Danzig and Green Day all sang songs of this title (3)
52 Chrissie Hynde's solo debut, guest starring Neil Young and John McEnroe (9)
53 ABBA song covered by Portishead (1,1,1)
55 Famed studio in Memphis, TN (6)
56 Andy Partridge's '07 improv project (10)
57 Frankie, Andy or Russell (6)

DOWN

1 Prince's 1984 bass line-free smash (4,5,3)
2 Julius Larosa's bullfighting hit of 1959 (6)
3 Dan Penn song covered by Sam & Dave, The Boxtops, Marvin & Tammi… (2,4,6)
4 Muddy Waters hangs onto his hat (4,4,4)
5 *The Who Sell Out*'s failure to connect (4,5,3)
6 String arranger of repute, member of Art Of Noise (4,6)
8 UK ambient house act who sampled Pink Floyd in 1990 (9)
9 Stan Ridgway's ghostly marine hit of '86 (10)
10 See photoclue B (3,4)
14 Laibach LP which contained a crazy cover of Queen's One Vision (4,3)
20 The Moody Blues' fabric of choice (5)
24 Leftfield's bin-shaking 1995 debut (7)
25 Simon & Garfunkel's key song for The Graduate (3,8)
26 Irish/Antipodean bassist who played with Mahavishnu Orchestra (4, 5)
29 Deke Leonard's Welsh rockers (3)
31 Purveyors of Crazee, Noize,Pleeze… (5)
33 I Am -------, The Membranes' crazed claim to aquatic vision in '85 (4,3)
35 Chet Baker's was ruined when he had his teeth knocked out (10)
39 Finnish Big Band who played with Billy Cobham (5)
40 U2 declare hostilities in 1983 (3)
41 Eat Static, probed by ETs in 1993? (9)
42 Keith Jarrett, going up in 1976 (9)
43 Where Steely Dan would love to tour, according to Pretzel Logic (9)
47 See photoclue C (4)
50 Chick Corea, existing with Dave Holland, Jack DeJohnette and more (2)
53 In 2022 he appeared on the French Masked Singer in a cowboy disguise (4)
54 The Eric Burdon Band demand you cease and desist in 1975 (4)
55 Edwyn Collins's label (3)



By Royal appointment: the "inseparable" Jennifer Herrema and Neil Hagerty in the late '80s.

Jennifer Herrema and Royal Trux

It began in a warehouse in Washington DC. The end? "A total holy fucking shit-show."

HELLO 1987

This was the beginning of my senior year, so I just turned 16. I lived in south-east Washington DC and I was bussed uptown to this little place where I went to school, in a house across the street from where Ronald Reagan was shot. One day I didn't go home after school, I went to a show in this neighbourhood, I didn't know anything about it except for my friend, Mitch [Parker], who was in Government Issue, was there. The band was The Jetboys Of N.W. That's the first time I ever saw Neil [Hagerty, guitar]. Immediately, I was like, I just knew that we were going to be friends.

There was a painter that I knew, Dane, and it turned out he and Neil shared the same painting area in this, like, 75-bucks-a-month, old warehouse with no bathroom or toilet. That's where Neil lived. Dane introduced us, and I started going to the studio after school, just to hang around and take acid and drink beer and talk and talk. Neil was 18 going on 19, he'd been thrown out of college and eventually, he was like, "OK, so we have to start this project." We both understood what it was going to be. I guess going with the flow is like, you know, antithetical to our vibe. We were always, like, fucking with shit – [at first] it was the two of us just on whatever instruments people had around at the time, everything was like, acid and improv! On an acid trip, we became boyfriend and girlfriend.

We played the DC Space [as Royal Trux] before Neil joined Pussy Galore. They asked him to move to New York with them, and then at the end of the year, I moved up there to go to school, and Neil would stay with me at the YMCA and we picked up where we left off. We were inseparable. We basically grew up together.

GOODBYE JUNE 2000

I was going through tons of shit. My dad was dying, I started doing drugs again, I felt like I was going around in circles. It was all a psycho blur. I saw into the future. Everything was just going to repeat itself unless I did something drastic, you know, fucking throw the card table over. So I did, and I'm glad I did. There was a last show [at 7th Street Entry, Minneapolis on June 25]. I didn't play it.

When I separated, Neil took it as like a personal separation. And so he had to disown it. He never wanted to hear the words 'Royal Trux' ever again and we didn't see each other for almost 20 years, except for when the various cats died, he would send me an e-mail.

It was really just shocking, out of the blue, when in 2015 he asked me if I wanted to do Royal Trux. I'm like, What the fuck are you talking about? So we did, and I liked doing those initial live shows, but making that last album [2019's *White Stuff*] was so hard. The plan was for the engineer to mix it and then just send it to us, so it would be neutral/neutral, but that turned into a total holy fucking shit-show too. Nothing was getting done, the guitar tracks hadn't been finished, and Neil like fucking disappeared from the studio and I had to fucking finish the fucking thing without him, right? There was a whole tour set up, and all of a sudden he pretended he didn't know about it. I just never saw him. That was it. I haven't talked to him since.

I'm never gonna initiate [doing it again] but I'm never gonna say never. Neil's like, my grown child, and you go through it with the kid. I was definitely worried when he was arrested and put in jail [Hagerty was arrested in Denver in April 2023 and accused of assaulting police officers: all charges were dropped in March]. I do need to hear he's OK – I talked to his wife and she's a badass. He's, like, part of my family, but from afar. I've got his back, always. I don't have anything bad to say about Neil, other than he's a fucking asshole! We started this project, and it will last until we're both dead. The quantum entanglement of our existence is real.

As told to Ian Harrison

Royal Trux's Twin Infinitives is reissued by Fire on June 14.

Courtesy of Jennifer Herrema, Jordi Vidal/Getty, Gie Knaeps/Getty

"Immediately, I just knew that we were going to be friends."
JENNIFER HERREMA

Trux stop: Neil and Jennifer towards the end; (left) Herrema, still fucking with shit.

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